



Manjola Veizi, Executive Director of the National Network of Roma and Egyptian Women, receiving smartphones on behalf of Roma women beneficiaries, under the EU-UN Women regional programme on ending violence against women in the Western Balkan and Türkiye and Vodafone Albania Foundation. Photo: UN Women Albania

FINAL EVALUATION
OF THE REGIONAL PROGRAMME
**ENDING VIOLENCE AGAINST
WOMEN IN THE WESTERN
BALKANS AND TÜRKIYE:
IMPLEMENTING NORMS,
CHANGING MINDS, PHASE II**



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Project information		
Project/outcome title	Ending violence against women in the Western Balkans and Türkiye: implementing norms, changing minds, Phase II	
Project number	QUANTUM 119373, 119532, 119583, 119605, 119631, 119636, 119639, and 119649	
Donor reference	Contract Number IPA/2019/413-716 and IPA/2020/420- 117	
Overall objective and specific objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overall Objective (OO): To reduce violence against women and girls and all forms of discrimination in the Western Balkans and Türkiye. • Specific Objectives: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SO1: To create an enabling legislative and policy environment in line with international standards on eliminating violence against women and all forms of discrimination. • SO2: To promote favourable social norms and attitudes to promote gender equality and prevent discrimination and violence against women. • SO3: To empower women and girls (including those from disadvantaged groups) who have experienced discrimination or violence to advocate for and use available, accessible and quality services. 	
Region and Countries covered	Region: Western Balkans and Türkiye Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo*, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia and Türkiye	
Project Dates	Start	Planned End Date
	1 February 2020	31 July 2023
Total Committed Budget	6,263,734 EUR	
Funding Source	European Commission	
Implementing Party	UN Women (Regional and Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, North Macedonia, Serbia and Türkiye) and UNDP (Montenegro)	
Evaluation Information		
Evaluation type (project/outcome/thematic/country program, etc.)	Programme Evaluation	
Final/midterm review/ other	Final Evaluation	
Period under evaluation	Start	End
	1 February 2020	31 July 2023
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Evaluation Dates	Start	Completion
	February 2023	July 2023

* For the European Union, this designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with United Nations Security Council resolution 1244/1999 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence. For UN Women, all references to Kosovo shall be understood to be in the context of UN Security Council resolution 1244 (1999).

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CHANGING MINDS, PHASE II



August 2023



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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

BiH	Bosnia and Herzegovina
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
CoE	Council of Europe
COMBI	Communication for Behavioural Impact
CRPD	Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
CRPM	Center for Research and Policy Making
CSO	Civil society organization
DV	Domestic violence
EC	European Commission
ECARO	Europe and Central Asia Regional Office (UN Women)
EIGE	European Institute for Gender Equality
ET	Evaluation Team
EU	European Union
EUDEL/EU Delegation	Delegation of the European Union to the respective country/organization
EVAW	Eliminating Violence against Women
EVAWIA	End Violence Against Women in Albania
FE	Final Evaluation
GBV	Gender-based violence
GCC	Groups for Coordination and Cooperation
GRB	Gender-responsive budgeting
GREVIO	Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic violence
HRBA	Human rights-based approach
IC	Istanbul Convention
IPA	Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance
KII	Key informant interviews
LGBTQI+	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender/gender diverse, queer, intersex and other
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding

NGO	Non-governmental organization
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OECD/DAC	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development / Development Assistance Committee
OSCE	Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
PM	Programme Manager
prodoc	Programme document
PSC	Programme Steering Committee
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
ToC	Theory of Change
ToR	Terms of Reference
TWG	Technical Working Group
UN	United Nations
UN Women	United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNEG	United Nations Evaluation Group
UNJP	United Nations Joint Programme
UPR	Universal Periodic Review
VAW	Violence against women
VAWG	Violence against women and girls
WAVE	Women Against Violence Europe

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Relevance

The evaluation of the Ending Violence against Women (EVAW) Regional Programme indicates its high relevance and strategic role in addressing violence against women (VAW) and promoting gender equality in the Western Balkans and Türkiye. The Programme's design and implementation align with the needs and priorities of the intended beneficiaries and key stakeholders, including civil society organizations (CSOs) and national-level institutions. The Programme has fostered cross-border collaboration, shared best practices, and leveraged resources and assistance from institutions like the European Union (EU) and the Council of Europe (CoE) by utilizing a regional approach.

One of the notable strengths of the Programme is its consistency with international norms and standards, such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the CoE's Istanbul Convention. It has supported participating countries in aligning their legislation with these international standards, enhancing support services for survivors, improving data collection systems and addressing harmful gender stereotypes. The Programme has also encouraged participating countries to submit shadow reports to international frameworks, creating advocacy frameworks for accountability and furthering policy reforms.

Moreover, the Programme's efforts have contributed to achieving various Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The Programme has given due consideration to disability inclusion and has prioritized the needs of women and girls with disabilities. It has integrated disability inclusion across policies, programmes and services, ensuring accessibility and empowerment through training, awareness campaigns and community events. The Programme has aligned its actions with the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) and advocated for inclusive policies, capacity-building and data collection.

UN Women possesses a comparative advantage in implementing the EVAW Programme due to its extensive expertise, experience and comprehensive support in addressing gender equality and violence against women and girls (VAWG). Stakeholders have highly regarded its proficiency in navigating the regional landscape, managing complex programmes, facilitating dialogue and fostering partnerships. UN Women's leadership, technical expertise and funding have played a pivotal role in complementing national resources and promoting best practices in EVAWG.

Coherence and responsiveness

The EVAW Programme effectively linked its objectives, activities and expected outcomes to address violence against women and girls in the Western Balkans and Türkiye, aligning with international standards such as CEDAW and the Istanbul Convention. However, the Evaluation Team (ET) identified areas for improvement, including the need for a more comprehensive and intersectional approach to address diverse forms of discrimination and violence. A consistent and comprehensive capacity-building strategy for service-providers was identified as crucial for delivering quality services.

The Programme has effectively collaborated with key stakeholders, including CSOs and national institutions, and has contributed to regional and international frameworks and goals. The coordination efforts of the EVAW Regional Programme are notable, mainly through Technical Working Groups (TWGs), which serve as integral coordination mechanisms. The TWGs streamline strategic approaches, communication and collaboration among partners, ensuring the alignment of resources, expertise and activities towards shared objectives. This unified approach enhances efficiency, avoids duplication and fosters a cohesive response to violence against women.

Efficiency

The Programme's operational and technical team, led by the Programme Manager and supported by the Programme Analyst and Communications and Visibility Consultant with country-level technical experts/ coordinators, played crucial roles in ensuring efficient budget management and successful implementation of activities. The team's coordination, communication and expertise contributed to the effective delivery of results throughout the Programme's implementation. Work plans were participatory and provided a solid basis for resource allocation, budget control and achieving results. They facilitated the coordination of activities, ensured synergy and collaboration with other initiatives, and maximized efforts in preventing and addressing violence against women.

The EAW Regional Programme has demonstrated efficiency in allocating and utilizing resources, effective coordination and implementation of activities, and a solid commitment to addressing violence against women and promoting gender equality. The Programme's allocated budget reflects a serious commitment to addressing violence against women and promoting gender equality in the Western Balkans and Türkiye. It has achieved high delivery and utilization rates, indicating the efficient disbursement and utilization of funds. The cumulative fund utilization rate for the overall EC funds during the evaluation period is 95.55%, reflecting efficient budget management and successful programme implementation across all participating countries.

The UN Women allocated the Programme budget strategically to address the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, support survivors, scale up initiatives and engage with stakeholders. The achieved and reported results demonstrated the efficient utilization of resources to achieve the Programme's goals and make a positive difference in the lives of women affected by violence.

Effectiveness

The EAW Regional Programme has demonstrated effectiveness in delivering its outputs and making a credible contribution to combating violence against women and promoting gender equality. The Programme has achieved positive changes in relevant statistical indicators and has contributed to a legislative and policy environment aligned with international standards.

One of the Programme's key strengths lies in its comprehensive and well-rounded strategies, which address the complex issues surrounding VAW. At the core of these strategies is the focus on 'strengthening women's organizations,' which is the foundation for empowering local entities deeply connected to their communities. By enhancing the capacity of these organizations, the Programme enables them to address diverse challenges with unique insights and locally relevant solutions, creating a ripple effect that influences other strategic components. This comprehensive approach fosters a mutually reinforcing interaction among strategies, amplifying their collective impact on combating VAW and promoting gender equality.

The Programme's efforts to create an enabling legislative and policy environment have been successful. Participating countries in the region have revised their laws and policies to align with international conventions such as the Istanbul Convention and CEDAW. For instance, Albania revised its Law on Measures against Violence in Family Relations and adopted a Strategy for Gender Equality. Bosnia and Herzegovina revised the Law on Protection from Domestic Violence, and Kosovo adopted amendments to the Constitution and a new Strategy for Protection from Domestic Violence. Montenegro adopted a new National Strategy for Gender Equality. Serbia ratified multiple changes, including a Strategy for the Prevention and Combating of Gender-based Violence against Women and Domestic Violence. CSOs have actively monitored and reported on the implementation of these legal and policy changes.

Efforts to promote favourable social norms and attitudes towards gender equality and the prevention of VAW have yielded positive results. The Programme launched an innovative communication campaign that leveraged the region's shared passion for football to challenge toxic masculinity and reshape perceptions of VAW. By engaging men and boys, the campaign has led to a shift in attitudes and increased awareness of critical issues such as toxic masculinity and gender inequality. The

Programme also employed the communication for behavioural impact (COMBI) methodology, conducting awareness-raising initiatives, capacity-building workshops, media campaigns and community dialogues to foster a more nuanced understanding of gender roles and equal opportunities.

These efforts have contributed to a significant shift in understanding and acceptance of gender equality among women, girls, men and boys at the community and individual levels. The COMBI methodology and various initiatives have challenged stereotypical gender roles and promoted gender equality. For example, in Albania, student-led initiatives disseminated knowledge about preventing and responding to violence among peers, while in Serbia, media training and mentoring programmes improved reporting on VAW. Montenegro implemented training programmes for women's NGOs and developed a web platform to support victims of violence. In Türkiye, campaigns focused on reducing school dropout rates and increasing awareness among fathers about gender-related issues and VAW. In addition to promoting gender equality, the Programme has focused on empowering women and girls, especially those from disadvantaged groups who have experienced discrimination or violence. By implementing international standards outlined in CEDAW and the Istanbul Convention, the Programme has developed protocols, standards and recommendations for support services, fostering coordination and cooperation among service-providers and improving access to justice and quality services.

The Programme has delivered a range of resources – including rulebooks, handbooks, guidelines, tools and recommendations – that provide a comprehensive framework for service-providers. These resources enhance risk assessment, crisis intervention, legal support, psychosocial counselling and referral mechanisms, ensuring a consistent and standardized approach to support services. By adopting these protocols and standards, service-providers can promote accountability, professionalism and effectiveness in addressing VAW.

The Programme made progress in improving support services and access to justice for survivors of violence in participating countries. Albania has strengthened coordination and referral mechanisms. Bosnia and Herzegovina has improved responses to domestic violence cases through protocol revisions and cooperation mechanisms. Kosovo has enhanced access to justice and introduced an online platform for free legal aid. Montenegro has established licensed services for victims of violence and conducted extensive training sessions for service-providers. North Macedonia has established specialist services and local multi-sectoral groups to deliver counselling and support services. Serbia has provided comprehensive support services and capacity-building initiatives for professionals while advocating for legal reforms, high quality of and improved access to free legal aid and women's rights protection.

Efforts have also been directed towards empowering women from marginalized communities, resulting in enhanced access to services and improved well-being. Capacity-development initiatives targeted at service-providers working with these groups have exceeded the target. The Programme has replicated successful models at the regional level, established a Regional Femicide Watch, and facilitated knowledge-sharing through seminars and conferences. These initiatives have driven systemic changes, improved coordination and promoted a comprehensive response to VAW.

While the Programme has encountered challenges, including deep-seated cultural norms, resource constraints, political instability and insufficient legal frameworks, its comprehensive strategies and regional commitment have mitigated these obstacles. The Programme's adaptability during the COVID-19 pandemic, its ability to foster strong networks and its alignment with EU policies have contributed to its effectiveness.

Sustained engagement, resource allocation, stable political environments, advocacy for comprehensive legal frameworks, and sustained political will remain crucial for addressing the challenges and ensuring the long-term success and impact of the Programme.

The EAW Regional Programme's focus on capacity-development, awareness-raising, confidence-building, expanding choices, and facilitating increased access to services has contributed to challenging and transforming structures and institutions perpetuating gender discrimination and inequality. The Programme has established safe spaces and counselling centres in countries like North Macedonia, Serbia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina to cultivate women's sense of self-worth. These spaces provide support and opportunities for women to share experiences, gain strength and reinforce their sense of self-worth. Legal aid and advice have also fostered self-confidence and empowered women.

The Programme's support in facilitating legislative transformations is evident in countries such as Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Kosovo, North Macedonia and Serbia. The formulation and amendment of laws targeting gender-based violence (GBV) in these countries, along with the endorsement of the National Strategy on Gender Equality in Albania, highlight the Programme's influence in equipping women with the necessary tools to comprehend and assert their rights.

Through the Programme, women's organizations have gained access to resources and opportunities for advocacy and engagement. Training, knowledge-sharing sessions, and engagements with government officials have empowered these organizations to advocate for ending violence against women at various levels. Providing free legal aid and the standardization of response to violence against women have also improved women's access to opportunities and crucial resources. While not central to the Programme, efforts have been made to empower women economically as a way to escape violence, with notable examples from Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia on economic reintegration of survivors. In addition, psychological, social and political aspects have created an environment supporting women's rights, choices and agency. By challenging harmful societal norms, improving coordination among service-providers and implementing robust laws and policies, the Programme has contributed to women's power to control their lives.

The Programme's emphasis on women's potential to influence social change is evident in the adoption of the Protocol for Treatment of Sexual Violence Cases in Kosovo and the establishment of Special Prosecutors' Offices for domestic violence cases in Serbia. These initiatives demonstrate women's instrumental role in driving policy decisions and systemic changes.

Impact

Regarding the changes in power dynamics, the Programme has created a platform for marginalized women's networks and engaged marginalized groups in discussions. These efforts have increased recognition of specific needs and promoted engagement. Collaborations between larger CSOs and grass-roots organizations, as well as partnerships with government authorities, have improved the visibility of marginalized organizations and shifted power dynamics towards a more balanced structure.

The Programme's influence on policy decisions and policy development is supported by examples such as legal analyses of issues impacting vulnerable women in Albania and North Macedonia. These analyses defined problems, propelled them into policy discourse and suggested legal revisions. The Programme's impact is also evident in the development of national strategies for gender equality and legal reforms in various countries. Additionally, the Programme's provision of tools, guidelines and instruments has standardized responses to violence against women and enhanced policy implementation.

The modest but consistent shifts in societal norms and attitudes towards gender equality and violence against women, as highlighted by stakeholders, demonstrate the cumulative power of persistent efforts. Increased reporting of violence, particularly from rural areas and vulnerable groups, indicates improved awareness and empowerment among women. Service-providers have acknowledged the Programme's impact on survivor-focused services and prevention efforts, emphasizing the deterrent effect of raising awareness about the consequences of gender-based violence.

Overall, the EAW Regional Programme has made significant strides in addressing gender-based violence and promoting gender equality in the Western Balkans and Türkiye. Its comprehensive strategies, effective utilization of resources, collaborative approach, and alignment with international and regional frameworks have contributed to positive outcomes and transformative changes. By empowering women and girls, engaging stakeholders and advocating for policy reforms, the Programme has laid a strong foundation for continued progress in the fight against violence against women and advancing gender equality in the region.

Sustainability

The evaluation of the ERAW Regional Programme's effectiveness in generating country and regional ownership, establishing partnerships with stakeholders, and developing capacities for sustainability reveals both promising progress and potential risks.

Regarding the sustainability of the Programme's results, the slow adoption and implementation of policies and legal frameworks for ending violence against women pose significant challenges across participating countries. Scepticism and delays in the EU accession process, coupled with difficulties in meeting Istanbul Convention targets, further jeopardize sustainability. Weak cooperation mechanisms, low accountability of authorities, limited resources for CSOs and essential service-delivery add to the risk. While governments' commitment to international and EU standards provides some assurance for policy-level sustainability, challenges in implementing legislative changes and harmonizing national legislation with international standards remain.

The Programme has effectively generated country and regional ownership of results and established partnerships with stakeholders. Stakeholders, including CSOs and women's organizations, have demonstrated increased ownership, engagement and influence in Programme activities and decision-making processes. Technical Working Groups (TWGs) have facilitated cooperation between State and non-State entities, strengthening coordination efforts. The Programme's support for CSOs was heavily dependent on coordination with State institutions, extending beyond TWGs, as evidenced by numerous examples and Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) signed between CSOs and central and local governmental institutions. For example, the success of capacity-building for service-providers relied on these MoUs and collaboration with State institutions. Partnerships with other relevant initiatives, such as the UN Joint Programme on Ending Violence against Women and collaborations with regional organizations and institutions, have expanded the scope and impact of interventions. However, there is a need for a formalized regional cooperation mechanism beyond the existing Regional Forum to maintain results and enable regional decision-making.

Stakeholders' capacities at the regional and country levels have been developed to ensure sustainability of efforts and benefits. CSOs have demonstrated resilience, adaptability and competency in delivering priority services and participating in policymaking related to ERAW. The Programme has supported capacity-building initiatives, knowledge transfer and the establishment of functional partnerships with authorities. However, challenges remain, including limited public funding for specialist support services, economic constraints and shifts in political landscapes that can restrict the operational space and effectiveness of CSOs.

The participation of CSOs and women's organizations in national and regional dialogue and decision-making spaces has been encouraged but lacks institutionalization. While effective national mechanisms exist in some countries, they often face resource constraints and lack genuine influence. Multi-agency coordination mechanisms involving CSOs and other partners have proven effective, fostering collaboration, improving referral mechanisms, and influencing legislation and guidelines. CSOs' participation in the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) process is crucial but relies on regular support from UN entities and government mechanisms.

To enhance the sustainability of achieved results, a multi-faceted approach addressing internal and external challenges is required. This includes promoting broader sector reform, strengthening strategic guidance, fostering international co-operation, and ensuring long-term financial resources (primarily from the national budgets and other sources) for CSOs and government institutions. Formalizing and institutionalizing participation mechanisms, establishing decision-making bodies involving government, civil society and other stakeholders, and securing sustainable funding sources are crucial for maintaining the achieved results and advancing gender equality and ending violence against women in the region.

The ERAW Regional Programme has demonstrated opportunities to continue and expand its results and activities. The Programme's initiatives have offered valuable insights and lessons for future programmes and policies combating violence against women and girls. It has showcased effective multi-institutional collaborations, innovative service-delivery methods and informed legislative advocacy. The Programme has documented and disseminated its practices, providing a comprehensive resource for other communities and regions interested in pursuing ERAW initiatives.

One notable initiative is the Femicide Watch, successfully implemented in Serbia and replicated in Albania and Montenegro. It involves investigating femicide instances and identifying gaps in the protective system, leading to more effective responses to protect women from violence. There is a call for a Regional Femicide Watch to monitor and compare femicide instances across the region for cross-country learning and system improvement.

The Programme has also facilitated multisector and multi-institutional coordinated response mechanisms among local service-providers. It has focused on grass-roots approaches, raising awareness of rights and gender equality among marginalized communities, such as Roma women, women with disabilities, and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex and other (LGBTQI+) women. The Programme has also emphasized innovation in establishing CSO-Government Dialogue Mechanisms, building media capacities to report on EVAWG, and promoting online access and inclusivity in service provision.

At the grass-roots level, the Programme has conducted campaigns against early marriage and implemented peer-to-peer initiatives to address gender-based violence. It has worked to strengthen the monitoring of women's human rights and EVAWG through networking and toolkits for effective reporting to international mechanisms. The Programme's inclusive and consultative planning approach has fostered a stronger sense of partner ownership and facilitated greater collaboration and learning among stakeholders.

CONCLUSIONS:

The EVAW Regional Programme has proven to be highly relevant, effective and efficient in addressing violence against women and promoting gender equality in the Western Balkans and Türkiye. It aligned with national, regional and international priorities and strategies, contributing to the EU accession process and capacity-building. The Programme showcased a strong commitment to disability inclusion and gender mainstreaming, fostering an inclusive society and empowering women and girls with disabilities. It effectively adhered to the "leaving no one behind" principle by delivering services to victims of violence and addressing the needs of vulnerable groups. The Programme's comprehensive approach and focus on key areas positioned it as a valuable contributor to achieving the SDGs in the region.

To ensure the long-term impact and sustainability of the Programme's interventions, it is crucial to address challenges related to funding, resources and the formalization of participation mechanisms. Sustainable funding sources and increased political backing are needed to support CSOs providing essential services for victims of violence. Strengthening partnerships and coordination between stakeholders, both at the regional and national levels, is vital for maintaining the Programme's effectiveness and cohesive response to violence against women. Additionally, efforts should be made to enhance coherence and responsiveness within the Programme, ensuring a comprehensive and holistic approach and exploring modalities for efficient resource management and innovative financing mechanisms.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

The Evaluation Team recommends supporting the EVAW Regional Programme, focusing on strengthening institutional mechanisms and coordination. Technical assistance and capacity-building should be provided to stakeholders involved in addressing violence against women, including law enforcement agencies, judicial systems, health-care-providers and social welfare organizations. To ensure a comprehensive and coordinated response, developing and implementing national action plans or strategies for ending violence against women, along with clear roles and responsibilities for all stakeholders, are essential. This should be accompanied by introducing a robust monitoring system and reporting practice to facilitate implementation and track achievements.

The ET emphasizes the importance of targeted capacity-building programmes for government officials, CSOs and service-providers to enhance their knowledge, skills and understanding of GBV and gender equality issues. The stakeholders should promote research and data collection on VAW and its manifestations to inform evidence-based policymaking and programme development. Leveraging technology and digital platforms can expand access to knowledge resources, training materials and support networks for stakeholders working on ending violence against women. Furthermore, the ET recommends integrating disability inclusion into all aspects of the ERAW interventions, including policy development, service-provision and awareness-raising initiatives. Collaboration between organizations representing women with disabilities, women's organizations and relevant government entities is crucial to develop targeted interventions that address their specific needs and challenges.

To strengthen the coherence and responsiveness of the Programme, it is recommended to integrate interventions and foster synergy among different components. Cross-sectoral collaboration and coordination between government agencies, civil society organizations and the private sector are crucial to address the root causes of GBV and promote gender equality. The ET emphasizes the importance of continuous assessment and adaptation of interventions based on the evolving needs and challenges faced by women and girls in the region. At the regional level, strengthening networks and partnerships are crucial, including regular forums, conferences and exchanges to facilitate dialogue, knowledge-sharing and joint learning among participating countries, national and regional organizations, and stakeholders working on ending violence against women. Engagement with international institutions such as the EU, the CoE and other critical entities involved in ending violence against women is recommended to leverage their expertise, resources and commitment to promoting human rights and gender equality. Strengthening country-level coordination efforts and fostering partnerships with other initiatives, organizations and projects on gender equality and violence against women will contribute to a more comprehensive and sustainable approach.

INTRODUCTION

This document encapsulates the outcomes of the final evaluation of the "Ending Violence against Women in the Western Balkans and Türkiye: Implementing Norms, Changing Minds - Phase Two" Programme (hereafter referred to as The Programme or EAW Programme). This strategic venture was conceived with the primary goal of addressing the pervasive issue of violence against women in the region, while simultaneously bolstering the implementation of strategies devised during the first phase, all in alignment with international standards.

Over the years, women's civil society organizations in the Western Balkans and Türkiye have demonstrated tenacity and resilience in their ongoing advocacy against violence towards women and girls. These efforts have led to substantial strides in recognizing this form of violence as a deep-rooted systemic issue anchored in gender discrimination. Despite these advancements and the adoption of legislation to advance gender equality, UN Women's preliminary assessment in 2014 uncovered that entrenched patriarchal structures and unequal power dynamics between genders continued to prevail. Furthermore, a lack of strong political will in various governments significantly impedes the full implementation of the adopted legislation.

In response to these enduring challenges, UN Women embarked on the second phase of the regional programme "Implementing Norms, Changing Minds," which commenced in February 2020 and is slated to conclude in July 2023. This initiative is a concerted effort to eliminate gender-based discrimination and violence across the Western Balkans and Türkiye, with particular attention given to the most disadvantaged groups of women. The Programme took a comprehensive approach to tackle this intricate issue, emphasizing the need for the full adoption and implementation of frameworks that align with international normative standards, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the Council of Europe (CoE) Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (known as the Istanbul Convention), and the cumulative body of European Union (EU) rights and laws.

The Programme went beyond simple enforcement of legal frameworks, addressing the structural causes of gender inequality at their roots, aiming to transform and challenge discriminatory stereotypes, perceptions and beliefs. It recognized that addressing gender inequality is equally

about changing policies and reshaping societal norms and attitudes. This transformation is crucial in tackling one of the most pervasive expressions of gender inequality – violence against women. Moreover, the Programme underscored the importance of protection, prevention and response to violence against women. These efforts are closely interlinked with ensuring survivors of violence have access to comprehensive, multi-sectoral services for physical and psychological recovery, access to justice and support for their reintegration into society. Lastly, recognizing the complex intersectionality of discrimination, the Programme paid particular attention to multiple forms of discrimination that often intertwine with gender.

The European Commission (EC) supported the Programme with a budget of €6,263,734, to address VAW in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), Kosovo, North Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Türkiye. As the Programme has now reached the endpoint of its current cycle, all involved parties – UN Women, the EC, CoE, the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) and national stakeholders – have agreed to the final evaluation (FE) and review achievements throughout the entire Programme's implementation.

The report commences with the first chapter, offering essential background information about the ongoing efforts to combat violence against women in the targeted countries and highlighting the needs and priorities. Subsequent sections detail the specifics of the Programme's second phase, including its strategic focus, outcomes and outputs. Chapter three delineates the evaluation's purpose and objectives and identifies its intended users. This chapter outlines the evaluation design and approach, detailing the methodology used, presenting the evaluation matrix, and discussing data collection, analysis, limitations, risks and mitigation strategies.

Chapter four presents the final evaluation findings, structured around evaluation questions and judgement criteria, substantiated by data. The fifth chapter offers conclusions and lessons learned, while chapter six draws recommendations from the evaluation results.

Annexes to this report are presented in a separate volume, providing additional information about the evaluation assignment and the applied methodology (including the evaluation matrix and results framework), thus contributing to a more detailed understanding of the entire evaluation process.

1. BACKGROUND AND EVALUATION CONTEXT

1.1. Gender equality and violence against women in the Western Balkans and Türkiye

Violence against women and girls, also known as gender-based violence, is a deeply rooted and widespread issue that spans across all cultures, countries and social classes. It comprises any act of violence or abuse, either physical, sexual or psychological, directed towards women and girls because of their gender. This violence is often fuelled by systemic gender inequality, harmful societal norms and cultural stereotypes. It takes many forms including, but not limited to, intimate partner violence, sexual harassment and stalking. Such violence inflicts significant harm, both physically and psychologically, and can even lead to death. Notably, the effects extend beyond the individual victim, negatively impacting families, communities and societies at large. In 2019, the OSCE conducted a survey focused on the well-being and safety of women in the Western Balkans and Türkiye, revealing a high prevalence of violence against women in the region. The study indicated that a striking 70 per cent of women have suffered some form of violence or abuse since the age of 15, encompassing physical, sexual and psychological violence, in addition to sexual harassment and stalking. Intimate partner psychological violence emerged as the most prevalent form.¹

Despite the alarming rates of violence, incident reports to authorities remain disconcertingly low. Reporting rates to the police after incidents of violence perpetrated by current partners ranged from a mere 2 to 9 per cent across different countries. In Türkiye specifically, the prevalence of physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence over a woman's lifetime stood at 38 per cent, with child marriage still a prevalent issue. The OSCE-led survey delivers fresh and comparable evidence that can aid policymaking processes and improve services to meet women's needs and implement the standards of the Istanbul Convention more effectively.

The high prevalence of violence against women in the Western Balkans is often viewed as a private issue, meant to be contained within the family. This perception leads to low disclosure rates compared to EU countries. A significant proportion of women in Albania, Kosovo and North Macedonia (48 per cent each), Montenegro (42 per cent), Serbia (29 per cent), and Bosnia and Herzegovina (25 per cent) believe that domestic violence should be managed within the family. Psychological violence stands as the most common form of intimate partner violence, affecting 60 per cent of women in the region during their lifetime. This rate significantly exceeds the EU average of 43 per cent. Certain risk factors make some women more susceptible to intimate partner violence, including living with a partner who is unemployed, self-employed or not working due to illness or disability; having lower educated partners or partners with alcohol abuse issues; and partners who participated in armed conflicts. Childhood experiences of violence emerge as the strongest factor contributing to a higher risk of violence, followed by economic deprivation and dependence, disability and displacement. The effect of violence on women's health and well-being is severe, with almost half of the women in Albania, BiH and Montenegro reporting physical injuries – such as bruises, scratches, wounds, sprains, burns and concussions – stemming from the most serious incident of violence they experienced.

International and regional normative frameworks are pivotal catalysts propelling the efforts to eliminate violence against women (and the Regional Programme's mission to fulfil its three objectives). The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women² (CEDAW) represents the universal standard for women's rights, illuminating the path to eliminating gender discrimination and GBV. The participating countries have ratified the Convention, while Kosovo champions gender equality as enshrined in its Constitution.³

1 Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE). 2019. OSCE-led survey on violence against women: Well-being and safety of women. Available at: https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/9/2/413237_0.pdf

2 On 18 December 1979, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly. It entered into force as an international treaty on 3 September 1981, after the twentieth country had ratified it. By the tenth anniversary of the Convention in 1989, almost 100 nations had agreed to be bound by its provisions.

3 UN Security Council resolution 1244 (1999) establishing the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) stipulated that the administration's responsibilities would include "protecting and promoting human rights."

Despite the fact that CEDAW doesn't directly cite violence against women and girls (VAWG), it nevertheless commits State Parties to eradicate all forms of discrimination against women. This commitment is fortified in the CEDAW Committee's General Recommendation No. 19, which substantiates that gender-based violence against women constitutes a form of discrimination infringing upon women's human rights.⁴

Over the years, the ratification of several instruments has further strengthened the international framework addressing gender discrimination and VAWG. Among these are the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women⁵ and the appointment of a Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls.⁶ The Commission on the Status of Women, in 2013, dedicated its focus to the elimination and prevention of all forms of violence against women and girls.⁷ Building upon these international norms, the CEDAW Committee introduced General Recommendation No. 35,⁸ an updated version of No. 19. This new recommendation recognizes the prohibition of gender-based violence against women as customary international law. Consequently, this international normative framework provides a road map for UN Women, State Parties and civil society organizations in their mission to counter gender discrimination, tackle violence against women, and advocate for gender equality.

The European Union enshrines gender equality as a cardinal value,⁹ vividly articulated in the Treaty of the European Union, the Charter of Fundamental Rights¹⁰ and the EU's Gender Equality Strategy 2020–2025.¹¹

- 4 <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-elimination-all-forms-discrimination-against-women>
- 5 <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/declaration-elimination-violence-against-women>
- 6 Resolution 1994/45, 4 March 1994. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/special-procedures/sr-violence-against-women>
- 7 UN Women's Regional Programme, titled "Implementing Norms, Changing Minds," encapsulates numerous initiatives proposed in the Commission on the Status of Women's Agreed Conclusions.
- 8 General Recommendation 35, para 2.
- 9 Consolidated versions of the Treaty on European Union and the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, 2012/C 326/01.
- 10 Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, Official Journal of the European Union, 2012/C 326/02.
- 11 European Union. 2020. EU Gender Equality Strategy 2020–2025. Available at: https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/gender-equality/gender-equality-strategy_en

The EU Acquis Communautaire, a body of law setting the standards for EU membership, underscores respect for fundamental rights.¹²

The CoE Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention)¹³ is the main European normative framework to combat violence against women. It has been ratified during the 2011–2014 period¹⁴ by all countries in the Programme region of the Western Balkans and Türkiye, with the exception of Kosovo,¹⁵ since it is not a member of the United Nations. Still, Kosovo's Constitution guarantees the direct application of CEDAW and places the Convention's authority above national legislation. The Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (GREVIO)¹⁶ independently monitors the Istanbul Convention's application, assessing and reporting on the measures – both legislative and beyond – undertaken by States Parties. This process includes the provision of specialized services for victims according to the Convention's provisions. GREVIO evaluates and reports on legislative and other measures, including specialized services for victims, taken by the States Parties to give effect to the provisions of the Convention.¹⁷

The European normative framework plays a crucial role in shaping the policy and legislative landscape and instigating reforms in the Western Balkans and Türkiye, especially as these countries navigate the EU accession process. The EU further promotes gender equality by integrating a gender mainstreaming perspective across all relevant programmes funded through the Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA). The European Parliament acknowledges the positive impact of the EU accession process on gender equality in candidate and potential candidate countries, primarily due to their adoption and modification of pertinent legislation in line with the highest

- 12 European Commission https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/enlargement-policy/glossary/acquis_en
- 13 Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention), 11/05/2011, CETS No.210. Available at: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/conventions/full-list/-/conventions/treaty/210>. It entered into force on 01/08/2014.
- 14 Council of Europe. https://www.coe.int/en/web/conventions/full-list/-/conventions/treaty/210/signatures?p_auth=OsjS3KE0
- 15 The only country in the region that could not ratify the CEDAW and the Istanbul Convention is Kosovo.
- 16 Information on GREVIO recommendations to States Parties is included in the following sub-section Council of Europe. About GREVIO; <https://www.coe.int/en/web/istanbul-convention/grevio>
- 17 Serbia and North Macedonia have reservations to articles 30 (compensation to victims) and 44 (territorial jurisdiction), while North Macedonia has reservations to articles 35 (criminalization of physical violence), 55 (ex parte and ex officio proceedings) and 59 (residence status).

EU and international standards. Funding instruments such as the IPA foster gender equality by incorporating a gender mainstreaming approach, with annual progress reports monitoring the degree of alignment with EU standards.¹⁸

However, despite progress, gender equality lingers as a secondary priority, with deeply ingrained traditional norms and gender roles persisting. Women continue to confront barriers in accessing the labour market, suffer from economic insecurity and are disproportionately exposed to the risk of violence. The EU progress reports for countries in the region shed light on the enduring challenges in advancing gender equality and empowering women. The pressing need to address violence against women and to effectively implement pertinent laws remains a vital concern.

National legal and policy frameworks and mechanisms for gender equality: Countries in the region are signatories or parties to key international conventions, including CEDAW (1981) and its Optional Protocol, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995), and the Istanbul Convention (2011). However, further commitments are needed. The UN Convention on Consent to Marriage, Minimum Age for Marriage and Registration of Marriages (1962) protects women from early and forced marriages, recognized as one form of violence against women by the Istanbul Convention. Albania is one of the countries that joined this convention. North Macedonia has not joined the European Convention on the Compensation of Victims of Violent Crimes,¹⁹ but Serbia did in 2010. Legal and policy frameworks across the region demonstrate significant efforts to promote gender equality, protect women's rights and improve their status. In addition, gender equality is promoted through overarching strategies and action plans. Some countries have also adopted separate strategies or plans for tackling violence against women and domestic violence (e.g., Montenegro and Serbia) or strategies to effectively implement the Istanbul Convention (e.g., BiH). However, gender equality policy commitments have recently declined. Amendments to gender equity and anti-discrimination laws often stall (for example, postponements, withdrawals and slow enactment of new Law on Gender Equality in Serbia during 2016–2021, or the lengthy procedure of adopting a new draft of the Gender Equality Law in North Macedonia).

As it stands, the region lacks structured, consistent mechanisms for gender equality at the regional level. The interaction between national gender equality mechanisms is intermittent and unsystematic, hinging mainly on informal and unstructured arrangements between various national gender equality institutions.

The methodological approach to gender equality varies across the region, with notable institutional form and capacity disparities. Central gender equality mechanisms take various forms; they are established as agencies, coordination governmental bodies or departments within various ministries. The intricate administrative structure of some countries, like Bosnia and Herzegovina, renders the implementation of gender equality mechanisms a complex undertaking. At the entity level, for instance, there are Gender Centres of the Federation of BiH and Republika Srpska, Cantonal Commissions for Gender Equality in the Federation, and Local Commissions for Gender Equality throughout BiH. Beyond mechanisms attached to the governmental (executive) branch of power, various other mechanisms are embedded within the legislative power. This includes, for example, in BiH, the Commission for Gender Equality of the Parliamentary Assembly of BiH, the Commission for Gender Equality of the Parliament, and the Commission for Equal Opportunities of the National Assembly of Republika Srpska. However, the primary mechanisms are typically situated within the entity's governmental structure.

To enhance both horizontal and vertical coordination mechanisms, gender equality mechanisms have established networks of gender equality focal points within line ministries, as seen in Albania, BiH, Serbia and North Macedonia. Unfortunately, there is a dearth of systematic evidence verifying the effectiveness of these efforts. In Serbia and Albania, the Commissioner for the Protection of Equality, a specialized institution, oversees the issues of equal opportunities and non-discrimination.

Despite these initiatives, these mechanisms frequently find themselves constrained by insufficient human and financial resources, which hinders their ability to implement gender mainstreaming across various policy areas effectively. This has been noted in the country-specific reports and the conclusions of the CEDAW Committee. The need for enhanced resources, systematic structure and regional cooperation remains paramount to advancing the cause of gender equality in the region.

18 European Commission. https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/enlargement-policy/strategy-and-reports_en

19 Still, North Macedonia has recently adopted the Law on State Compensation for Victims of Violent Crimes, which includes women survivors of violence.

1.2. The Programme 'Implementing Norms, Changing Minds' Phase II

The Programme "Implementing Norms, Changing Minds" Phase II aimed to diminish gender-based discrimination and violence against women and girls in the Western Balkans (Albania, BiH, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia) and Türkiye. It focused particularly on the most marginalized groups of women.

The Programme had specific objectives, which were: (i) to foster an enabling legislative and policy environment to eliminate violence against women and all forms of discrimination; (ii) to encourage favourable social norms and attitudes to prevent gender discrimination and violence against women; and (iii) to empower women and girls, including those from disadvantaged groups, who have experienced discrimination or violence, enabling them to advocate for and use available, accessible and quality services.

Phase II of the Programme leveraged the results and partnerships established during Phase I, which created platforms and networks of CSOs at IPA beneficiary and regional levels, contributing to law-making, policy development and implementation, and reporting to human rights instruments and mechanisms. A regional mechanism was also established to engage key stakeholders from government, human rights institutions, justice, police and CSOs to address issues relating to progress in the implementation of the Istanbul Convention. Moreover, a theoretical framework and tools were provided to organizations representing minorities to enhance service provision for survivors. Additionally, over 3,000 law enforcement officers and service-providers involved in prevention, prosecution and protection in cases of VAW received training in case management, data collection, reporting, and referral and response mechanisms. More than 1,000 survivors received direct psychosocial and legal support. Furthermore, over 3,000 community members participated in activities intended to influence their perceptions and behaviours regarding gender equality and violence against women.

Building on the achievements from the first phase, the findings and recommendations from the Rapid Assessment, "Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on specialist services for victims and survivors of violence in the Western Balkans and Türkiye: A proposal for addressing the needs", shaped this second phase. Conducted in April and May 2020 among 40 CSO programme partners, the assessment uncovered the need for mid-term investments in general and specialist services for survivors of VAWG to adapt to better

serve all women and address the expected post-pandemic rise in violence. While the Rapid Assessment was limited in scope, it revealed that services are ill-equipped for crises caused by infectious diseases and identified weak spots in the system for prevention and protection. As with any crisis, the pandemic posed challenges but also offered opportunities for innovation as organizations adjusted their services to meet the new reality. This innovation required support to develop more effective and higher-quality services.

During Phase II, the Programme embarked on a range of initiatives while also continuing previous efforts. Central to these efforts was strengthening women's voice and agency to advocate for and support governments in implementing recommendations from the GREVIO report. This particularly applies to the targeted countries (IPA beneficiaries) where a report was issued in Phase I. The Programme also focused on producing GREVIO reports for these countries where different parties were called to do so. It further supported the implementation of Concluding Observations from the CEDAW Committee by monitoring the achievement of indicators and proposing required changes in legislation, policies and practices. An additional focus was on advocating for, implementing and monitoring the integration of initiatives to end VAW into policy frameworks, plans and packages designed to address the impact of COVID-19.

The Programme worked to solidify regional mechanisms for dialogue and exchange among civil society organizations and governments. It also tested approaches to encourage changes in community and youth behaviour towards gender equality and violence against women, promoting a "zero tolerance" stance and working towards the reduction of harmful gender stereotypes, including "toxic masculinities".

In addition, the Programme increased the capacities of service-providers from police, health, education, and local government sectors to manage cases related to all forms of violence against women following the standards of CEDAW and the Istanbul Convention. In this context, the Programme fostered cooperation between CSOs providing specialist services and local service-providers, ensuring accessible, quality service provision for women and girls. Furthermore, the Programme aimed to mitigate the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on women and girls and enhance service resilience to crises, addressing the gaps exposed by the COVID-19 pandemic in providing general and specialist services.

Efforts included building and strengthening the capacity and coordination mechanisms of key services run by State and non-State service-providers to prevent impunity of perpetrators and improve the quality of response in cases of violence against women. The Programme expanded the scope of support (in addition to essential services), addressing the economic vulnerabilities of women survivors, including those from minority and marginalized groups, which were addressed to aid their societal reintegration. In connection to this, the Programme also prioritized working with male perpetrators, aiming to increase the safety and well-being of women and children by interrupting and preventing violent behaviour.

The Programme worked on improving data collection and analysis on the gender-related killing of women (femicides) to identify gaps in the intervention system, criminal justice and criminal procedures system. This was particularly crucial in addressing risk factors to prevent and protect women and girls from those killings during and after the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Programme outlined **main strategies to achieve these objectives**, including advocating for changes in laws and policies, enhancing the capacity of women's organizations, challenging norms and practices that exclude or discriminate against women, and improving access to comprehensive and high-quality essential services specifically tailored to meet the needs of women.

The Programme sought to strengthen the capacity of women's organizations to hold governments accountable, advocate for effective implementation, and monitor prevention and response to violence against women. By tackling the structural causes of gender inequality, including violence against women, the Programme aimed to transform gender discriminatory stereotypes, perceptions and beliefs. It also emphasized the necessity of availability and access to comprehensive, multi-sectoral services for survivors of violence as essential for protection, prevention and response to violence against women, addressing multiple forms of discrimination where gender is a factor.

Originally planned from 1 February 2020 to 31 July 2021, the Programme received an extension until 31 July 2023, with additional funding for all countries except Türkiye (The Amendment No. 1 signed in December 2020). The Programme budget has been EUR 6,628,161, with the European Commission contributing a maximum amount of EUR 6,263,734 and UN Women EUR 364,427 from its core resources.

Target groups and beneficiaries: The Evaluation Team (ET) ensured inclusive participation from stakeholders, including both men and women. The ET actively involved those directly affected or concerned by the EVAW initiative: the CSOs that participated and benefited from the activities. The ET involved vulnerable women and girls as the ultimate beneficiaries through CSOs or other service-providers and used other surveys and research that provided insights into how processes and interventions impact their lives. As such, the evaluation employed a human rights-based approach (HRBA) that incorporated principles of transparency, equality and non-discrimination.

The ET identified various key stakeholders- duty-bearers (primary duty-bearers with decision-making authority and secondary duty-bearers who held direct responsibility for the intervention) and rights-holders (direct and indirect beneficiaries). The ET provided a comprehensive analysis, combining HRBA and development actor perspectives in Annex 1 and Annex 2.

Programme governance: The Programme is coordinated through two main bodies: the Programme Steering Committee (PSC) at the regional level, and the Technical Working Groups (TWGs) in each IPA beneficiary.

The membership of the PSC was comprised of UN Women's Europe and Central Asia Regional Office (ECARO), the EU's Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations (Western Balkans Regional Cooperation and Programmes Unit), CoE and EIGE, and representatives of CSOs (CSO representatives are beneficiaries of the Programme). The PSC provided high-level strategic guidance for the implementation of the Programme and its strategic objectives, results and associated activities to improve the efficiency, effectiveness and coherence of the Programme in helping to achieve its overall impact. The PSC meets at least once a year and holds ad hoc meetings, if needed. PSC meetings are organized online.

The TWGs coordinate programmatic implementation and are composed of technical staff representing the EU,²⁰ UN Women technical staff, relevant ministries (when relevant) and Programme partners, selected among CSO beneficiaries of the Programme.

20 EUDEL in each IPA beneficiary and staff from EU institutions, bodies and programmes with presence in the IPA beneficiaries.

2. EVALUATION

OBJECTIVE, PURPOSE AND SCOPE

2.1. Objectives and purpose of the final evaluation

The Terms of Reference (ToR) outlined the primary objectives and purpose of this evaluation, to evaluate the Programme's progress and performance towards achieving its intended results. In addition to this, the evaluation served three interconnected purposes: accountability, learning and decision-making. Under accountability, the evaluation strived to determine if the Programme has fulfilled its stated objectives and whether the resources allocated have been used effectively and efficiently. The learning aspect focused on generating invaluable knowledge and insights to enhance the Programme's future iterations. Lastly, decision-making pertained to providing crucial information that aids in making informed decisions regarding the Programme's future. In alignment with these broad goals, the final evaluation was designed with the following specific objectives:

- Analyse the relevance and coherence of the Programme's objectives, strategy and approach at both country and regional levels. This included assessing the Programme's intervention logic concerning the needs of CSOs in the region and the priorities set by the European Commission in its policy and strategy documents.
- Assess the effectiveness and potential measurable impact of the Programme's intervention on the region and target countries.
- Assess organizational efficiency in progressing towards achieving the Programme's results as defined in the intervention.
- Assess the sustainability of the results and the intervention's potential in ending gender-based discrimination and violence against women in the region and target countries.
- Identify and document lessons learned, good practices, innovations, success stories and challenges within the Programme to inform UN Women's future work on the EAW thematic area. The evaluation team has systematized good practices and analysed the rationale behind their success.

- Identify strategies for replication and up-scaling of the Programme's best practices.
- Provide actionable recommendations for future programme development and strategies to maximize ownership by partners in the region covered by the Programme.
- The Evaluation Team undertook an in-depth assessment of the added value of UN Women's regional programming, extending it to several key areas: leveraging regional partners, establishing connections with regional normative frameworks like the Istanbul Convention and the EU *acquis communautaire*, and promoting regional integration and cooperation. Additionally, it examined the Programme's role in fostering a culture of knowledge-exchange and learning among countries within the region. One of the focuses of the evaluation was the Programme's impact on strengthening women CSOs and mobilizing the women's movement, which is vital for driving change at the grass-roots level.

2.2. Scope of the evaluation

The Final Evaluation covered the timeframe from 1 February 2020 to 31 July 2023, reflecting the extended duration of the EAW Programme (as per Amendment No. 1 signed in December 2020). The Programme had a regional dimension and scope, with activities and strategies deployed at both regional and country levels. Therefore, the evaluation assessed the implementation and achievements of the Programme's activities and strategies, both at the regional level and within the participating countries of Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, North Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Türkiye (the Programme implementation in Türkiye covered the period of 18 months from February 2020 to July 2021).

This final evaluation has covered all EAW Programme components, aspects and strategies.

3. EVALUATION APPROACH AND METHODOLOGY

3.1. Specific approach to this evaluation

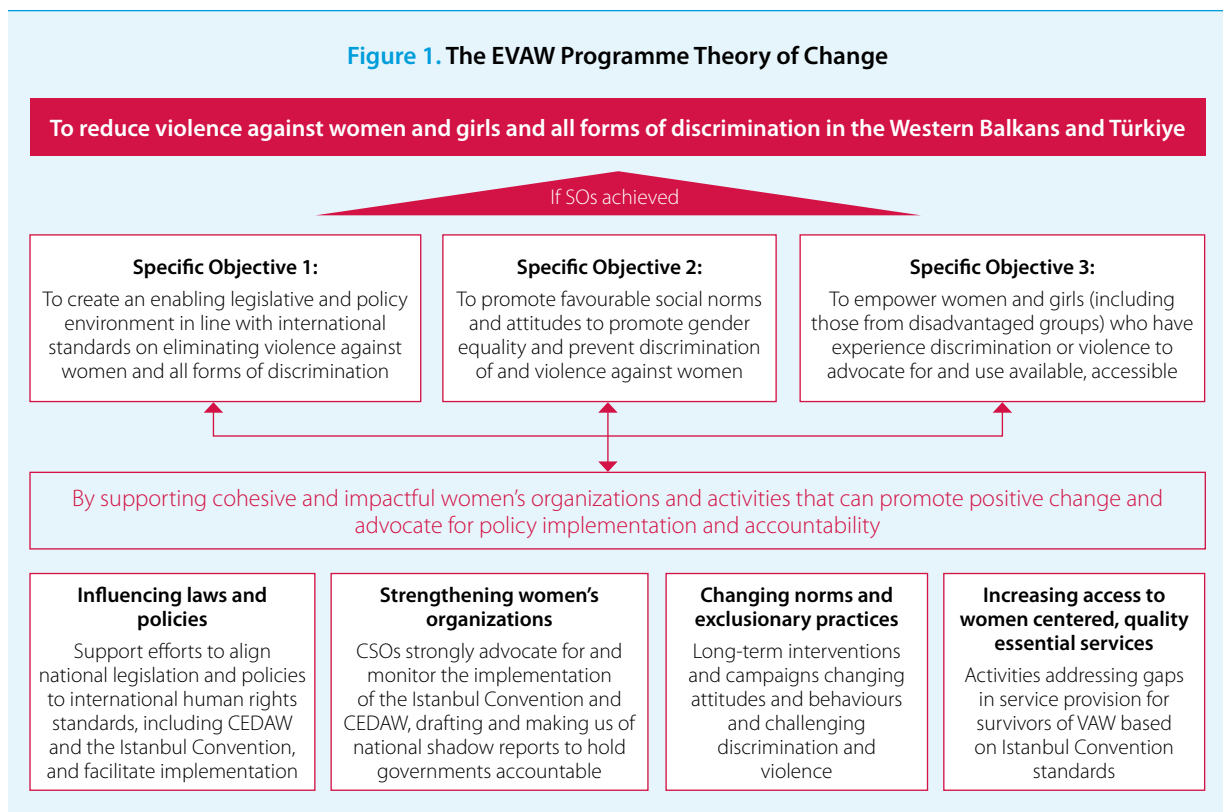
The framework for the Final Evaluation was defined within the ToR. Abiding by its provisions, a custom methodology was developed by the evaluation team. The core reference for this methodology was the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's Development Assistance Committee (OECD/DAC) Evaluation Criteria. In addition, the ET upheld the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) norms and standards and integrated the UNEG's guidance on incorporating human rights and gender equality in evaluations. The evaluation was designed to be gender-responsive, maintain a human-rights-based approach, and embody both systems thinking and feminist theory.

The ET utilized a theory-based evaluation approach following the directives outlined in the ToR. This included using the Programme's Theory of Change (ToC) as a tool to assess the Programme's relevance, effectiveness, impact, efficiency and sustainability. Furthermore, the ET

compared the ToC with empirical data gathered throughout the evaluation process, as well as information obtained through the Programme's monitoring and evaluation system. The collated data provided valuable insights into the logical sequence of the results, the validity of the major assumptions, the occurrence of expected changes at the outcome level, and the relevance of the chosen indicators.

3.2. Analysis of the Theory of Change

The Programme was guided by UN Women past and ongoing strategies and methodologies tested and implemented in the field of addressing discrimination and ending VAW. More specifically, UN Women's "theory of change" – which defines the building blocks required to fulfil women's and girls' human rights through the reduction of violence against women and girls – shaped the Programme's strategy.



*The Programme is based on a set of assumptions and preconditions for a pathway of change: **if** (1) an enabling legislative and policy environment in line with international and regional standards on eliminating discrimination and violence against women and girls is in place and translated into action; **if** (2) favourable social norms, attitudes and behaviours are promoted at community and individual levels to prevent violence and discrimination against women and girls; and **if** (3) women and girls who experience violence are empowered to use available, accessible and quality essential services to recover from violence; **then** (4) there will be a substantial reduction in violence against women and girls, because (5) violence is being prevented before it happens or before it reoccurs, and those experiencing violence will be empowered to recover and rebuild their lives with appropriate assistance and support.*

This Theory of Change conforms to the global Flagship Programme Initiative that UN Women has launched and accordingly, aligns the Programme with the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly SDG Goal 5 (Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls).²¹

The ET found that the Programme has incorporated most of the language from the UN Women Flagship Programme for its three specific objectives and long-term goal. However, the ET noted that the Programme did not explicitly adopt or modify the assumptions outlined in the flagship initiative due to the narrower focus of the Programme. To prevent any ambiguity, the analysis presented below concentrates solely on the Programme's ToC diagram and accompanying explanatory text in the programme document (prodoc).

Specific Objective 1: To create an enabling legislative and policy environment in line with international standards on eliminating violence against women and all forms of discrimination.

The FE considers that the assumption under Specific Objective 1 could be that the duty-bearers in the region possess sufficient capacity to implement legislation and policies to guarantee the rights of women and girls, provide them with access to justice, and end the impunity of perpetrators. Alternatively, the assumption may be that other development programmes adequately support government duty-bearers. This Regional Programme will

²¹ Regional Programme prodoc; UN Women. 2015. UN Women Flagship Programming Initiatives. <https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Headquarters/Attachments/Sections/Library/Publications/2015/UN-Women-Flagship-Programmes-Booklet-en.pdf>

provide significant value by supporting CSOs to complement the implementation of national frameworks that comply with the Istanbul Convention. The Programme management confirms that this assumption holds for Albania, BiH, Serbia, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Kosovo but not for Türkiye.

The government authorities from most countries are engaged in some programme activities, but they do not receive direct financial support from the Programme because of its implementation modality through CSO support. At the national level, government stakeholders participate in the Technical Working Group with UN Women (UNDP in Montenegro), EU and CSO representatives responsible for project implementation. The ET believes that there may be a gap in the change pathway and possible changes of the specific objective statement could focus on strengthened women's organizations' contribution to the enabling legislative and policy environment (omitting "and translated into actions that are backed up by adequate budget" from the assumptions, as part of the prodoc's explanation of the ToC). The change pathway needs to focus on how strengthening CSOs will converge with duty-bearers' efforts to implement the legislative and policy framework.

The ET evaluated how the Programme addressed governmental stakeholders' ability to implement rights-based legislation and policies and how the advocacy and monitoring work of women's CSOs related to the legislative and policy framework connects effectively with duty-bearers' efforts. Additionally, the ET observed the power dynamics between CSOs and government stakeholders.

Specific Objective 2: To promote favourable social norms and attitudes and prevent discrimination and violence against women.

According to the prodoc, achieving the objective of promoting favourable social norms, attitudes and behaviours at both the community and individual levels will contribute to reducing violence and discrimination against women and girls. However, the ET finds that due to the Programme's support volume and especially its financial limits, it may be unrealistic to expect significant behavioural changes within the Programme implementation period. Furthermore, the Programme has already recognized the ambitious nature of the specific objective and has adjusted its approach in this area.

The Programme supported the development of CSOs' capacities in applying communication techniques for behavioural impact. The ET reviewed and analysed how

communication and advocacy practices have contributed to attitudinal and behavioural change and formulated conclusions and recommendations related to the assumptions in the change pathway.

Specific Objective 3: To empower women and girls (including those from disadvantaged groups) who have experienced discrimination or violence to advocate for and use available, accessible and quality services.

The Programme's overall change logic aims to reduce violence against women and girls by achieving its three objectives. Still, it does not explicitly identify assumptions under this specific objective related to availability and accessibility of quality services. However, the ET notes that there are implicit assumptions, such as the empowerment of women and the availability of services for those who have experienced discrimination and violence, provided by trained personnel who adhere to national and regional standards.

Therefore, the ET analysed and evaluated the Programme's contribution to women's empowerment and assessed whether it has supported the development of essential services that are accessible, available and meet quality standards (as those outlined in the Istanbul Convention).

During the data-collection phase, the ET reviewed the ToC with stakeholders, asking whether the ToC was and remained valid and credible. The ET assessed the validity and credibility of the ToC through an analysis of the intervention logic, including the hierarchy of objectives, potential gaps in the logic, and the sufficiency of preconditions to reach specific and overall objectives. In addition, the ET analysed whether the ToC is realistic and achievable, assessing if the Programme can achieve its overall objective and ensure impact. The ET analysed whether the partners, including UN Women, governments and CSOs, have enough capacities and resources to implement the Programme or require additional support. Furthermore, the evaluation assessed whether the scope, expectations or timeline of the ToC needed any adjustment. The ET presented these findings in the appropriate parts of this report.

3.3. Evaluation questions and evaluation matrix

The Evaluation Team has prepared the evaluation matrix (Annex 3), which includes the main evaluation questions and the criteria defined in the ToR – relevance, coherence, efficiency, effectiveness, impact and sustainability. The ET

provided additional sub-questions to make the evaluation matrix more focused. The final evaluation considered additional cross-cutting criteria, gender mainstreaming and leave no one behind.

The ET ensured that the questions were answerable and all Programme components appropriately addressed, avoiding duplication or undue overlap.

3.4. Data-collection methods and instruments and data analysis

This evaluation required a meticulous examination of project documents and materials. The ET developed data-collection templates, following the evaluation matrix that outlined the documents that served as sources of information in response to an evaluation question. The ET, using templates based on the evaluation matrix information, recorded insights from all examined documents. Materials for review included regional and national-level documents.

The ET utilized a **mixed-methods approach**²² for this evaluation to derive knowledge from a diverse set of participatory data-collection methods. These methods ensured inclusivity, meaningful participation and empowerment throughout the process. The employed techniques respected the agency and knowledge of project stakeholders, particularly women from diverse backgrounds. Striving for optimal objectivity, the ET incorporated data methods that avoided alienation and consistently contemplated power dynamics between evaluators and subjects. Hence, the ET predominantly relied on qualitative data-collection methods, enriched by quantitative methods, mainly through secondary analysis of the Programme's monitoring data. Qualitative data collection involved semi-structured, open-ended key informant interviews, group interviews and reflection workshops. Data triangulation was employed to authenticate findings and detect convergence and divergence.

The **desk review** began with an appraisal of the Programme and strategic documents provided by UN Women and relevant open-source publications. These included strategic-level documents like the UN Women Strategic Plan 2022–2025 and UN Women Flagship Initiatives brief, programme-level documents like action plans, and statistical information pertinent to EVAW in participating countries and the region.

22 Hesse-Biber, S. 2014. "Feminist approaches to mixed methods research" in Hesse-Biber, Sharlene-Nagy (Eds.), *Feminist Research Practice: A Primer*. pp. 363–388.

Recorded findings from the document reviews were organized using a standardized analytical tool based on the evaluation matrix, questions and criteria, and then cross-verified with other data sources to produce robust findings. Data from all sources were organized according to key evaluation questions and made accessible to all evaluation team members through an electronic platform. This approach (and its clarity) was crucial for establishing a solid evidence chain linking the project's objectives, evaluation questions and the data-collection and analysis methods.

The literature review examined academic and grey literature on two main themes: external/contextual factors such as legal, political, security, economic and societal aspects influencing the Programme's implementation and documented positive experiences in EVAW. The ET assessed secondary data, including regional and national political and economic statistics, gender relations and third-party data about the EU accession process and the changing international norms and standards for women and girls in the region.

Primary data collection: The ET employed gender-sensitive and feminist methodologies, involving both men and women stakeholders. This approach was enriched by the principles of transparency, equality and non-discrimination encapsulated within the Human Rights-Based Approach.

The ET prepared and implemented data-collection plans for each country, also designing regional-level data collection plan, targeting both duty-bearers²³ and rights-holders. The rights-holders included persons with disabilities and women and girls from all walks of life, particularly those from marginalized and disadvantaged groups affected by violence and discrimination. However, the limited resources for the evaluation and the sensitivity of the situation for victims of violence, affected direct interaction with these groups. Therefore, the Evaluation Team relied primarily on quantitative information on the increase of users or services or reported cases, complementing them with data obtained from specialized organizations (that deliver services or represent the final beneficiaries). This approach allowed for assessing the Programme's components, although having direct input from the beneficiaries would have been valuable.

23 This group included duty-bearers with significant decision-making authority, those with direct responsibility for the intervention and secondary duty-bearers.

The ET selected key informants from those involved in country-level and regional activities, amassing a total of 116 key informant interviews (KIIs). These interviews were semi-structured and conducted in the respondent's language, fostering open and candid discussions. Missions to all participating countries were organized; however, interviews with the regional stakeholders and informants from Türkiye were conducted online. Group discussions within interviews with CSOs examined the Programme's effectiveness, sustainability, and recommendations/priorities for the future.

3.5. Data analysis

The ET analysed data and employed the qualitative data analysis software, MAXQDA, to upload completed data-collection instruments, including document review prepared templates, semi-structured interview notes from individual and group meetings, and discussions or reflection reports and briefs. The ET prepared codes and classifications based on the Evaluation Criteria, main questions and sub-questions from the evaluation matrix. Classifications or other attributes (such as duty-bearer, CSO, rights-holder) and implementation strategy, were added to enable data analysis tailored to the evaluation purpose. This approach facilitated both qualitative content analysis and quantitative analysis.

Content analysis included: i) comparison of responses among respondents of the same category and between categories in order to identify the number of similar and different responses (trends); and ii) comparison of response with relevant international, regional and national normative standards or strategies.

The ET cross-validated information through triangulation of methods,²⁴ using MAXQDA to facilitate a comparative analysis between methods, ensuring the accuracy of findings. Practically, the ET synthesized results from interview responses, group discussions, programme documents and secondary data (statistical and documentary). The ET reviewed these findings against international normative standards and regional priorities. In addition, the ET conducted a triangulation of sources to ensure the internal validity of findings, examining multiple data sources

24 Morras-Imas and Rist define triangulation of methods as "Collection of the same information using different methods in order to increase the accuracy of data", Morra-Imas, L. G. and Rist, R. C. 2009. *The Road to Results: Designing and Conducting Effective Development Evaluations*. Washington, D.C., World Bank. p. 300.

before concluding. This ‘triangulation’ involved verifying and cross-checking major trends from three or more data sources. For instance, the ET examined information from UN Women, EU, CSO implementing partners, government institutions, rights-holders, and external experts to identify major trends shared across data sources.²⁵

3.6. Limitations, risks and mitigation measures

The ET faced some limitations and challenges that required a comprehensive methodology for evaluating the EAW Programme. It included quantitative and proxy data analysis, in-country visits and interviews. By examining indicators related to violence against women and gender equality, the evaluation team sought to capture essential aspects of the Programme’s effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability. Based on findings and conclusions, the ET prepared a set of recommendations designed to address challenges and contribute to the ongoing improvement of EAW-related efforts in the Western Balkans and Türkiye.

Contextual variations: Most of the participating countries have a shared legacy. However, different development paths have characterized the last three decades in these countries, contributing to diverse sociopolitical contexts, cultural norms and legal frameworks among participating countries. These variations have influenced the implementation and outcomes of the Programme, making it difficult to draw definitive findings that applied uniformly across the Programme and link country-level progress to overall objectives.

Mitigation: The ET adopted a specific focus to evaluate changes and progress within each country. This approach recognized the unique challenges, successes and circumstances of each country-level programme component. By conducting in-depth analyses at the country level and considering regional-level achievements, the evaluation team aimed to establish credible links to outcome-level changes. The analysis of regional-level achievements additionally contributed to this process while acknowledging the complexity of the regional landscape and the diversity of country contexts.

Absence of regional EAW policy and implementation/ cooperation mechanisms: The absence of a dedicated EAW regional policy framework and more formal implementation/cooperation mechanisms confined the ability to effectively align and coordinate EAW

initiatives across participating countries. In addition, these factors could affect established regional partnerships and informal networks.

Mitigation: The evaluation highlighted the need for a regional policy framework to coordinate and support regional-level EAW activities. Such a framework would enhance the coordination and cooperation among countries in addressing violence against women. A regional policy framework could promote greater coherence and effectiveness in addressing EAW challenges across the region by establishing a common platform for information exchange, collaboration and sharing of best practices.

Limited direct interaction with beneficiaries: Establishing direct interaction with beneficiaries, particularly victims of violence, was challenging due to the sensitive nature of their situations and the limited resources for this evaluation.

Mitigation: Recognizing this challenge, the evaluation team relied on a combination of quantitative data and proxy information obtained from organizations delivering services or representing the beneficiaries. By analysing quantitative data on increases in service usage or reported cases, along with proxy data from service-providers, the evaluation aimed to assess the Programme’s components and outcomes. While direct input from beneficiaries would have been valuable, the evaluation team employed alternative approaches to gather meaningful insights.

Quantitative focus: The indicators have been predominantly quantitative, such as for example, the increase of users or services, or in the proportion of women and girls subjected to various forms of violence by an intimate partner (and the existence of legal frameworks promoting equality and non-discrimination – yes/no indicator). While the quantitative indicators provide a foundation for understanding progress, they may not fully capture the complexity and nuances of the expected changes and multifaceted nature of the desired outcomes.

Mitigation: The ET acknowledged the need for qualitative data and more in-depth analysis to fully comprehend the complexities of violence against women and the promotion of gender equality. Therefore, the ET organized numerous interviews, group discussions and field visits. In addition, the ET analysed various survey results that CSOs and other development partners carried out to complement and triangulate the initial findings.

25 Morras-Imas and Rist, p. 376.

Efficiency assessment: The absence of well-established benchmarks on organizational efficiency in the context of development assistance required the ET to focus on analysing management processes and structures, including meeting minutes from steering committee meetings and other forums, interviews with committee members, and reviewing project materials and deliverables.

Mitigation: By carefully comparing and cross-referencing these findings, the team ensured a comprehensive understanding of the Programme's management processes and structures. In addition, the team leveraged their extensive professional experience in the field of development assistance to interpret the data and draw well-informed conclusions. This combination of evidence-based analysis and expert knowledge allowed them to assess the efficiency of the Programme's management practices and identify areas for improvement. The insights gained from this process were instrumental in providing valuable recommendations to enhance the Programme's effectiveness and operational efficiency.

Sustainability assessment: While the ET made efforts to assess the potential for sustainability, the dynamic nature of the operating environment and the long-term impacts of the Programme require ongoing monitoring and evaluation beyond the evaluation timeframe.

Mitigation: To address potential challenges to sustainability, the ET actively considered factors that could impact the Programme's achievements in each participating country. The ET engaged with key stakeholders and assessed the political, social and economic dynamics and the institutional capacity and commitment to sustaining the Programme's outcomes. By forecasting sustainability prospects and developing strategies accordingly, such as promoting capacity-development and fostering collaboration, the ET aimed to enhance the likelihood of maintaining the Programme's impact beyond the evaluation timeframe.

3.7. Ethical considerations

The ET is fully independent, free of any conflicts of interest for this work. During the evaluation process, the ET followed the principles of impartiality, credibility and accountability and aligned with the OECD/DAC ethical considerations for development evaluations²⁶ and United Nations Ethical Guidelines.²⁷ The ET followed ethical considerations in selecting interviewees, interacting with them, and respecting their personal and institutional rights. In addition, the ET requested informed consent from stakeholders before asking any questions related to the Programme evaluation. To obtain consent, the ET briefly explained the reasons and objectives of the evaluation and the scope of the questions. Stakeholders had the right to refuse or to withdraw at any time. The ET also ensured respondent privacy and confidentiality, as the disclosure of confidential information may seriously jeopardize the efficiency and credibility of the evaluation process. Therefore, the ET was responsible for exercising discretion in all matters of the final Programme evaluation, not divulging confidential information without authorization. The ET respected informants' rights to provide information in confidence and also ensured that sensitive information could not be traced to its source, thus protecting key informants from eventual reprisals.

Original data, including interview records and notes from interviews, will be retained in confidential files until completion of the evaluation.

26 <https://www.oecd.org/development/evaluation/qualitystandards.pdf>

27 United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG). 2008. UNEG Ethical Guidelines for Evaluation. UNEG/CoC.

4. PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

The final evaluation has presented the following findings, responding directly to the evaluation criteria and questions detailed in the scope and objectives section of the report and are based on evidence derived from data-collection and analysis methods described in the methodology section of the report.

4.1. Relevance

The analysis has been carried out with the intention to evaluate the Programme's relevance at any point during the life cycle. The ET assessed the area of involvement and the validity of the Regional Programme's intervention logic, including if it addressed strategic priorities concerning VAW as well as the needs of partners and target groups. The ET also analysed whether the established benchmarks remained valid and achievable during implementation.

JC 1.1. The extent to which the design of the intervention, including the formulation of its planned results, is relevant to the needs and priorities of the intended beneficiaries and key stakeholders

F1.1.1. The ERAW Programme's design is based on an inclusive approach that involved collaboration with representatives from key partner institutions, including CSOs, allowing for a bottom-up process of identifying needs and challenges related to ERAW. Through this approach, the ERAW Programme has ensured demand-driven technical assistance that considers the unique characteristics of the region and participating countries (including priority partners and institutions). As a result, partners – mainly targeted CSOs and national-level stakeholders and institutions – have stated that the Programme has helped to develop their capacities (especially for the delivery of services) in the area of VAW prevention and response.

The Programme has established and utilized **four** implementation strategies to achieve its objectives: (i) strengthening national capacities and policies on ERAW; (ii) improving access to quality services for survivors of violence; (iii) promoting the prevention of violence against women; and (iv) strengthening data-collection systems. These strategies, in combination, have successfully addressed the needs of the Programme's beneficiaries and

stakeholders through tailored technical support to participating countries. Furthermore, through partnerships with CSOs, the Programme has considered beneficiaries' unique characteristics and specific needs, including those of most vulnerable women and girls affected by violence.²⁸ This has been ensured through small-scale consultations and critical insights generated through long-lasting cooperation with UN Women Country Offices.

CSO representatives have acknowledged the relevance of calls for proposals to their needs for continued delivery of services. However, some have expressed a desire for more flexibility in project design to enable more extensive support to the needs of beneficiaries and stakeholders.²⁹

The Programme also addressed the needs of employees from social protection sectors (health, justice and security) for integrated citizen-focused service-delivery that is based on international standards and best practices. In connection to this, the Programme has been relevant in fostering participatory policy and decision-making processes, as noted by CSOs and other stakeholders involved in local referral mechanisms and structures in charge of the implementation of ERAW measures and the delivery of priority services.

Stakeholders highlighted that the regional approach has addressed their needs, ensuring multiple advantages. They underlined that common understanding and shared cultural and historical contexts fostered cross-border collaboration between stakeholders (CSOs and authorities, for example). These efforts led to more "robust responses, shared best practices and experiences."³⁰ In addition, engaging with regionally present/represented institutions, like the EU and the CoE, helped "amplify the initiative's impact by leveraging their resources, expertise, and support."³¹ Furthermore, the regional approach further emphasized the value of CoE membership and supported EU accession process promoting unified policy reforms in IPA countries.³²

28 Such as women from ethnic minorities, refugee and migrant women, women with disabilities, and rural women.

29 KII notes

30 KII notes

31 KII notes and the analysis of deliverables at the regional level.

32 KIIs mentioned that the Programme enabled discussions and facilitated learning on harmonizing legislation, standards and protocols to create a robust legal framework (as EU membership requires).

JC1.2.1. The extent to which the Programme is consistent with national priorities and strategies on EAW

F1.2.1. The Programme is fully consistent with international normative standards, such as the CEDAW and the Istanbul Convention, and has effectively supported the harmonization of national legislation on EAW.

The Programme supported participating countries in harmonizing national legislation with international standards on EAW, helping them to comply with CEDAW requirements and Istanbul Convention, addressing key recommendations put forth by GREVIO.³³ In addition to proceeding with legislative reforms, these recommendations encompass enhancing the availability and quality of support services for victims and survivors, reorganizing and improving data-collection systems, and addressing harmful stereotypes and patriarchal attitudes that perpetuate gender-based violence.³⁴

The Programme adopted a tailor-made approach based on the specific national context and the relationship between CSOs and (respective) governments and institutions. In some countries, aligning national legislation with international norms involved more direct participation, advocacy and lobbying of partner CSOs. Partner organizations conducted advocacy campaigns, provided critical input on draft laws, and analysed the implementation of current laws, thereby addressing critical gender equality and VAW issues.³⁵

The ET finds that the Programme has been relevant in supporting partners to submit shadow reports to international legal frameworks like CEDAW and GREVIO, thus, creating

relevant advocacy frameworks and additional pressure to authorities and governing institutions.³⁶

JC 1.2.2. The extent to which the Programme is consistent with regional priorities on EAWG (specifically, Europe and Central Asia priorities)

F1.2.2. The Programme's targeted and comprehensive approach aligned with EU priorities, policy initiatives and funding mechanisms, enabling collaboration among various stakeholders; thus, it effectively supported IPA countries in meeting EU standards and bolstering their pre-accession reform processes.

The Programme was instrumental in contributing to EU norms and the accession process, specifically addressing areas identified by the European Commission as weak in reforms related to EAW. This included supporting Chapters 19, 23 and 24 of the EU's negotiation frameworks,³⁷ which focused on social policy, employment, judicial and fundamental rights, justice, freedom and security, respectively.

Fully aligned with the EU's multifaceted framework that prioritizes gender equality and violence prevention, the Programme meticulously targeted the critical priority areas identified in the EU Gender Equality Strategy 2020–2025.³⁸ These areas include combating gender-based violence, challenging pervasive societal stereotypes, and relentlessly promoting gender equality in all spheres of life. To provide comprehensive support to the victims of GBV, the Programme supported improvements in legislation and fortified support services, working to ensure a responsive and empathetic system. An integral part of its mission was the targeted efforts to tackle harmful societal attitudes and patriarchal norms that often perpetuate violence against women.

33 Kill notes and programme materials. Analysis of other reports available for Serbia.

34 Council of Europe. 2021. "GREVIO publishes its General Recommendation No. 1 on the digital dimension of violence against women," <https://www.coe.int/en/web/istanbul-convention/-/grevio-publishes-its-general-recommendation-no-1>

35 In BiH, the CSO Safe Network designed the Law on Protection from Domestic Violence that is at the House of Representatives in BiH for approval; in Kosovo, the Kosovo Gender Studies Center submitted inputs on the draft Law on Prevention and Protection from Domestic and Gender-Based Violence that is being discussed at the Parliament Commission of Laws; in Serbia, the Association Fenomena, in partnership with the Law Faculty of the University of Kragujevac, supported the Law on Legal Aid; and in Albania, the Monitoring Network Against Gender-Based Violence in Albania observed the implementation of the Law on Social Housing, the Law on Free Legal Aid and the Law on Domestic Violence, and actively contributed to legislative reviews and amendments focused on domestic and gender-based violence.

36 In Montenegro, SOS Hotline Podgorica, which took the lead in partnership with SOS Hotline Niksic, Women's Safe House and Centre for Roma Initiative (which represents marginalized and minority groups of women) prepared and submitted the CEDAW and GREVIO shadow reports. In Albania, the Monitoring Network against Gender-Based Violence submitted the Istanbul Convention and CEDAW Shadow Reports. Similarly, partners in Serbia developed a shadow report for CEDAW on the implementation of priority recommendations from the CEDAW Committee and CSOs in North Macedonia prepared a GREVIO shadow report (2021).

37 The Programme contributes to Chapter 23: Judiciary and Fundamental Rights, supporting the improvement of legal frameworks, judicial processes, and institutional capacity related to EAWG. Concerning Chapter 24: Justice, Freedom and Security, the Programme helps improve the overall response to gender-based violence and ensures that victims receive the necessary support and protection by fostering cooperation among law enforcement agencies, judicial authorities and civil society organizations.

38 <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52020DC0152>

The Programme supplemented the priorities of the European Social Fund³⁹ and the Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values Programme⁴⁰ to create a society that respects and protects the rights of all its citizens. It also contributed to improving the conditions for women to succeed in the labour market, helping eliminate gender disparity in employment.

Aligned with the UN Women's Global Flagship Programme Initiative,⁴¹ the Programme was instrumental in strengthening the capacities of CSOs and enhancing their ability to provide essential services. In addition, the Programme's objectives echoed the strategic priorities outlined in the Beijing Declaration,⁴² specifically its focus on promoting social norms that prevent violence against women. It implemented various measures, including awareness-raising campaigns and policy dialogues, to challenge and change harmful stereotypes about women. Upholding the principles of non-discrimination and the right to life, liberty and security enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Programme's relentless efforts addressed and aimed to eliminate violence against women. Consistent with this commitment, the Programme aligned its actions with the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, as well as the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. Both these treaties form part of the International Bill of Human Rights, further reflecting the Programme's commitment to upholding and promoting human rights on a broad scale.

F1.2.3. The Regional Programme remained responsive to the needs of beneficiaries and well-aligned with EVAWG-related regional and national strategic priorities.

Analysis of changes on the demand side⁴³ shows that the EVAWG Regional Programme's intervention logic remained

39 <https://ec.europa.eu/esf/home.jsp>

40 https://commission.europa.eu/about-european-commission/departments-and-executive-agencies/justice-and-consumers/justice-and-consumers-funding-tenders/funding-programmes/citizens-equality-rights-and-values-programme_en#:~:text=It%20was%20created%20along%20with,on%20the%20rule%20of%20law

41 <https://www.unwomen.org/en/how-we-work/flagship-programmes>

42 <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2015/01/beijing-declaration>

43 The ET assessed if the external developments required response and if the Programme adjusted and fine-tuned its intervention as set out in the ToC and its intervention logic. The evaluation has focused on whether the overall objective and outcomes, as the main references under the intervention logic, remained valid and achievable or whether there was a case for revision to take account of changes in the external environment, demand or speed of delivery.

relevant throughout its implementation. Key strategic documents, such as the EU's Gender Equality Strategy 2020–2025 and UN Women and national strategies and legal frameworks, recognize the need for strengthening efforts to eliminate violence against women and girls and promote gender equality in the Western Balkans and Türkiye. These documents emphasize the importance of creating effective and inclusive partnerships among CSOs, authorities and other stakeholders while fostering a comprehensive approach to implementing Istanbul Convention and GREVIO recommendations and also addressing the root causes of GBV. In this context, recent EU Progress Reports on participating countries⁴⁴ acknowledge efforts to address EVAWG and implement the Istanbul Convention. However, they also highlight the need for continued efforts to strengthen legal frameworks, enhance the quality, availability and sustainability of support services for survivors, and tackle harmful gender stereotypes and patriarchal attitudes that contribute to violence against women.

The ET analysis and partners' statements show that limited capacities and funding gaps for implementing EVAWG services – and more broadly gender-responsive policies with effective coordination among stakeholders – remain underlying constraints, threatening long-term EVAWG prevention efforts in the region. Therefore, countries need support to bridge skills gaps, build institutional capacity, expedite reforms and improve the performance of public structures, while also working on the sustainability of support that CSOs provide to end violence against women and girls.

In recent years, various indicators have shown that these countries remain below the levels obtained in EU countries regarding gender equality and EVAWG prevention, and the distance has been widening.⁴⁵ Thus, the importance of the strengthened role of CSOs and partnership with authorities at various levels, enhanced implementation mechanisms and availability and quality of services and monitoring and evaluation tasks have also been emphasized as critical. Thus, the Programme's areas of intervention and engagement with stakeholders have been confirmed as highly relevant in the context of eliminating violence against women and girls in the region.

44 https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/enlargement-policy/strategy-and-reports_en

45 For example, UNDP's Gender Inequality Index <https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/thematic-composite-indices/gender-inequality-index#/indicies/GII> or the World Bank's Worldwide Governance Indicators for the Western Balkans and Türkiye: <https://info.worldbank.org/governance/wgi/>

JC 1.3. The extent to which the intervention is consistent with, and contributes to, the Sustainable Development Goals

F1.3. The Programme's efforts have contributed to progress under various SDGs and established targets.

Under SDG 5 on gender equality, the Regional Programme supported EAW efforts, enhancing access to justice and support services, raising awareness about gender-based violence and promoting women's meaningful participation in decision-making processes. To end discrimination against women and girls (Target 5.1), the Programme has actively lobbied for policies and legislation that eliminate discriminatory practices. Additionally, the Programme has undertaken awareness-raising campaigns and capacity-building initiatives for institutions and CSOs, to address deeply entrenched gender-based discrimination and promote gender equality. In terms of eliminating violence against women and girls (Target 5.2), the Programme has been proactive in developing and implementing strategies and action plans, strengthening the capacity of service-providers, and engaging communities in prevention efforts. Moreover, the Programme is committed to ensuring equal participation and opportunities for leadership (Target 5.5). Its initiatives promote women's active involvement in decision-making processes and encourage women's representation in political, economic and public life.

In relation to SDG 16: Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions, the Programme has played a crucial role in strengthening the capacities of CSOs and national institutions. The focus on building institutional capacity to address and prevent GBV aligns with the targets of SDG 16. Relevant activities include developing legislation, policies and strategies that meet international standards, promoting access to justice for survivors, cultivating a culture of inclusivity and enhancing institutional accountability.

The Programme also made a contribution to SDG 10: Reduced Inequalities, by ensuring that the needs of marginalized and vulnerable groups were addressed. In line with Target 10.2, the Programme focused on eliminating specific barriers and establishing inclusive policies to ensure equal access to services and opportunities for marginalized and vulnerable victims of violence.

Finally, the EAWG Regional Programme also contributed to SDG 3: Good Health and Well-being, supporting Target 3.7 by offering physical and psychological support to VAW survivors, enhancing their well-being and facilitating their reintegration into society.

JC1.4. The extent to which disability inclusion has been considered and reflected in the Programme's design and during its implementation

F1.4. UN Women's EAW Programme prioritized disability inclusion, fully cognizant of the multi-dimensional challenges faced by women and girls with disabilities.

The Programme systematically integrated their needs across supported policies (national strategies and laws), programmes and services, spanning education, health care, employment and social protection sectors. Notably, it ensured that training sessions, awareness campaigns and community events were accessible to women and girls with disabilities by providing necessary accommodations, such as appropriate communication means and ensuring the physical accessibility of venues. Moreover, the key informants stated that the Programme's support, including operational policies and advocacy efforts, consistently highlighted the rights and needs of women and girls with disabilities, advocating for removing barriers and creating enabling environments for their full and effective integration and participation.

The Programme's efforts are closely aligned with the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), advocating for rights-sensitive, gender-responsive and disability-inclusive policies. These efforts included persuading governments in the region to harmonize their legal frameworks with the CRPD, particularly in the areas of violence prevention, access to justice and service-provision. These actions directly contributed to realizing CRPD principles and promoting the rights of women and girls with disabilities, embodying a strong alignment with human rights frameworks and coherence with the broader disability rights movement. For instance, in Serbia, the Programme collaborated with women's rights organizations and government institutions to review laws and policies and, among the international norms and standards, ensure compliance with the CRPD. Similarly, in North Macedonia, it bolstered advocacy efforts to include the rights and needs of women with disabilities in the National Action Plan for Gender Equality.

In addition to policy-level activities, the Programme emphasized empowering women and girls with disabilities through capacity-building opportunities for improved delivery and access to essential services (and critical resources). The Programme's expansive network of partnerships with CSOs and authorities, disabled people's

organizations in some participating countries, and other UN agencies amplified the scope and effect of its gender equality and disability inclusion efforts.

For example, in Albania, these overarching commitments have been translated into concrete actions to empower women with disabilities, Roma women, and women from the LGBTQI+ community by enhancing their capacities to report violence and access available services. A plethora of resources was created by the Albanian Disability Rights Foundation, including a guide on violence against vulnerable women, a legal analysis of the national framework's inclusivity, a COVID-19 Resource Kit, a Guidebook on free legal aid, and a resource kit for women's rights organizations. These tools were designed to empower, inform and provide recourse to women from vulnerable groups while ensuring that service-providers were better equipped to respond to their unique needs and situations.

The importance of data was recognized, with the Programme supporting initiatives to bolster disability-disaggregated data-collection and monitoring systems, enhancing the understanding of specific challenges and informing the development of more effective, evidence-based policies and programmes.

The EVAW Programme thus diligently worked to counter the discrimination and marginalization faced by women and girls with disabilities, fostering an inclusive and equitable society that values all women's rights and opportunities, irrespective of their abilities.

JC1.5. To what extent does UN Women possess a comparative advantage in the Programme's area of work in comparison to other UN entities and relevant stakeholders in the Western Balkans and Türkiye, and in the regions?

F1.5. The FE finds that UN Women's comparative advantages included substantial expertise and experience in addressing gender equality and combating violence against women and girls.

UN Women's staff offered comprehensive support, providing communication and visibility, technical assistance and capacity-building in areas such as project management, planning and implementation, which has particularly benefited grass-roots organizations. They also contributed to generating knowledge products and applied behavioural science principles in the design of EVAW projects and initiatives. The partners stated that UN Women staff supported them to explore the factors that influence violence-related behaviours and utilize this understanding to design interventions that promote positive behavioural change

and address the root causes of violence. Additionally, the partners recognized guidance they received from UN Women on incorporating behavioural science principles to improve the accessibility and user experience of support services, ultimately aiming to overcome barriers and tailor interventions to individual needs and circumstances.

UN Women's distinct capabilities were acknowledged throughout the region, irrespective of differing national contexts. Partners lauded UN Women's proficiency in navigating a multifaceted landscape of national and international organizations, and other donors dedicated to combating VAWG. They valued UN Women's in-depth understanding of international frameworks, human rights, gender equality standards, and its innovative methods for sharing this expertise.

Stakeholders praised UN Women's capacity to effectively manage, administer and implement a programme of such scale and complexity at the regional level. Even with a few reservations from CSOs about EU fund allocation, the majority acknowledged UN Women's unrivalled capability to effectively manage CSO engagement across the region. Its adaptability and responsiveness to changing situations were also applauded, along with its strategic approach to facilitate CSOs' access to financial resources and technical support.

UN Women's Programme was particularly valued for its ability to foster open regional dialogue on EVAW in the absence of a regional intergovernmental mechanism or government-civil society platform. The Programme was seen as a catalyst for fostering collaboration and knowledge-sharing among key stakeholders, thereby building a cohesive regional response to EVAW and creating the foundation for long-term partnerships.

Government representatives appreciated UN Women's leadership and provision of technical expertise and funding to areas with insufficient national resources. They also credited UN Women with facilitating partnerships with CSOs and promoting best practices in EVAWG. The UN partners echoed this sentiment, recognizing UN Women's clear mandate to lead and coordinate efforts to realize women's rights and opportunities, while also highlighting the best practices and lessons learned they received from UN Women.

Finally, UN Women's Programme was praised for amplifying the voices of marginalized groups, including grass-roots women's organizations and survivors of violence, ensuring that these voices were included in decision-making processes. This facilitated the creation of more inclusive, targeted and culturally sensitive interventions, addressing the root causes of violence against women and girls.

4.2. Coherence and responsiveness

JC2.1. The extent to which the objectives, activities and results of the EAW Programme are logically consistent and contribute to the achievement of changes (expected outcomes)

F2.1. The EAW Programme demonstrated a robust strategic framework, linking its objectives, activities and expected outcomes to combat violence against women and girls and eradicate discrimination in the Western Balkans and Türkiye. By adhering to international standards such as CEDAW and the Istanbul Convention, the Programme set its objectives and aligned them coherently with the respective outcomes and targeted outputs.

For instance, Outcome 1 was designed to shape a supportive legislative and policy environment aligned with international norms, realized through two specific outputs. The first aimed to fortify women's advocacy for laws and policies conforming to international standards, and the second encouraged the review and reform of existing laws to ensure alignment with human rights standards. In addition, Outcome 2 was committed to nurturing positive social norms and attitudes, promoting gender equality and preventing violence against women. This outcome was advanced by a dedicated output that devised innovative tactics to counteract harmful gender stereotypes and another that enhanced understanding and acceptance of gender equality at the individual and community levels. Further, Outcome 3 centred on empowering women and girls, particularly addressing those from marginalized groups who had experienced discrimination or violence. One output ensured that support services adhered to the standards of CEDAW and the Istanbul Convention, and another optimized case management for victims of violence and discrimination, emphasizing assistance for marginalized groups.

Despite the logically structured framework, the ET identified some areas for enhancement. While the Programme demonstrated a clear vertical logic – effectively linking objectives, activities and outcomes – it lacked horizontal integration. This indicated a need for a more intersectional approach encompassing diverse forms of discrimination and violence. Additionally, the need for a more consistent and holistic capacity-building strategy for service-providers was recognized as required to ensure the delivery of quality services.

The Programme was also advised to embrace a whole-of-society strategy, actively engaging CSOs, governance

structures at various levels, and citizens and communities in a comprehensive approach. The ET also pinpointed challenges related to defining targets and measuring progress. While output-level indicators and benchmarks effectively encapsulated the Programme's initiatives, the outcome-level indicators presented some challenges. They required extensive data collection, and some targets were found to be overly ambitious or misaligned with the Programme's intervention areas. These issues could hinder the accurate measurement and reporting of progress at the outcome level, obscuring the direct impact of Programme outputs on outcomes. Therefore, it was suggested that the Programme reassess and refine its outcome-level targets and indicators, facilitating more effective progress-tracking and impactful evaluation.

JC2.2. The extent to which the Regional Programme adheres to the corporate strategic priorities of UN Women and the UN Women Strategic Notes in the implementing countries

F2.2. The Regional Programme adheres to the corporate strategic priorities of UN Women and the UN Women Strategic Notes in the implementing countries.

The Regional Programme distinctly resonated with the UN Women Strategic Plan 2022–2025,⁴⁶ emphasizing the thematic priority area of Ending Violence Against Women and Girls. The Programme devoted resources to fostering a supportive legislative and policy environment, enhancing institutional capacities and ensuring survivors' access to essential services. It further echoed the Strategic Plan's goal of promoting social norms that reject violence against women. This focus was manifested through initiatives aimed at increasing awareness of VAWG, advocating for gender equality and transforming harmful social norms.

The Programme indirectly supported other core areas of the Strategic Plan. Through its capacity-building initiatives and engagement with CSOs, it fortified women's

⁴⁶ The Strategic Plan 2022–2025 articulates how UN Women will leverage its unique triple mandate – encompassing normative support, UN system coordination and operational activities – to mobilize urgent and sustained action to achieve gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls and support the achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The Plan mainstreamed integrated approaches with seven systemic outcomes to address the root causes of inequality and affect broader systems change, across its thematic focus areas: i) governance and participation in public life; ii) women's economic empowerment; iii) ending violence against women and girls; and iv) women, peace and security, humanitarian action, and disaster risk reduction. More at: <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2021/09/un-women-strategic-plan-2022-2025>

leadership and involvement in decision-making processes linked to combating VAWG. It also subtly fostered women's economic empowerment by addressing the pervasive issue of VAWG, thus contributing to an environment where women can actively and effectively participate in the workforce without the burden of violence and discrimination.

The Programme's intersectional approach recognized the unique forms of violence and discrimination faced by women and girls from diverse backgrounds. This perspective was instrumental in addressing the challenges of marginalized groups, further aligning with UN Women's strategic priorities. Moreover, the Programme's alignment extended to country-specific priorities outlined in UN Women Strategic Notes.⁴⁷ It adapted its strategies to each participating country's distinct context and needs, earning recognition from partners for its assistance in cultivating an environment conducive to preventing and addressing VAWG. The ET acknowledged that the Programme's emphasis on legislative and policy reform mirrored both UN Women and participating countries' priorities. It addressed the root causes of gender inequality and violence against women and girls. Furthermore, the Programme prioritized strengthening the institutional capacities of civil society organizations and service-providers, ensuring that critical stakeholders had the necessary resources to fulfil their mandates and apply legal frameworks and policies tied to EAWG.

JC2.3. The extent to which the Regional Programme aligns with national and regional policies, strategies, and initiatives related to ending violence against women and girls

F2.3. In its conscientious alignment with national and regional policies, strategies and initiatives dedicated to ending violence against women and girls, the Regional Programme showcased a deep appreciation for the distinct sociocultural, historical and institutional contexts across the Western Balkans and Türkiye. The Programme navigated the spectrum of societal characteristics, from unfinished modernization processes to socialist legacies and patriarchal cultures that continue to prevail. It acknowledged the heterogeneity of these societies while simultaneously identifying shared dynamics to inform its approach and tailor its initiatives.

At the regional level, the Programme's objectives aligned with the EU's Strategy "Enhancing the accession process

47 Generally, the Programme facilitated the establishment of legal frameworks and policies that adhere to international standards, such as CEDAW and the Istanbul Convention, in participating countries.

– A credible EU perspective for the Western Balkans⁴⁸ emphasizing the strengthening of the rule of law, justice access and democratic governance. It focused on institutional development and judicial reform to address violence against women, while also supporting the capacity-building of women's rights organizations, highlighting the crucial role of civil society in promoting democratic governance and human rights protection. The Programme addressed socioeconomic development as a catalyst for regional stability⁴⁹ and prosperity by fostering the economic reintegration of violence survivors. It recognized that empowerment encompasses various dimensions and viewed economic empowerment as integral to survivor recovery and societal transformation, contributing to economic growth and stability.

In its strategic commitment to gender equality and women's empowerment, the Programme synergized with the Regional Cooperation Council's 2030 South East Europe Strategy⁵⁰ contributing to its vision of gender equality and equal opportunities.

At the national level, the Programme's strategies aligned with existing legal and policy frameworks that uphold gender equality and prohibit discrimination. It complemented these frameworks by enhancing policy implementation and effectiveness, aligning with overarching gender equality strategies and action plans in participating countries. In Albania, the Programme directly corresponded with the National Strategy for Gender Equality 2021–2030,⁵¹ mainly under Strategic Goal III. In Kosovo, it matched the National Strategy on Protection against Domestic Violence

48 European Commission. 2020. "Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and The Committee of the Regions: Enhancing the accession process – A credible EU perspective for the Western Balkans". Brussels. https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2020-02/enlargement-methodology_en.pdf. The 2018 communication is available at: https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2023-01/annex-communication-credible-enlargement-perspective-western-balkans_en.pdf

49 European Commission. 2020. (Ibid.)

50 Regional Cooperation Council. 2021. "South East Europe – SEE2030 Strategy." <https://www.rcc.int/pages/148/south-east-europe-see-2030-strategy>

51 "National Strategy of Gender Equality 2021–2030" Approved by the Council of Ministers Decision No. 400, dated 30 June 2021. The National Strategy of Gender Equality was developed with the technical support of UN Women in the framework of the UN Joint Programme on EAW, funded by the Government of Sweden. The costing of the Strategy was made possible through the technical support of UN Women under the regional project "Transformative Financing for Gender Equality towards more Transparent, Inclusive and Accountable Governance in the Western Balkans" funded by Sida. More details available at: https://shendetesia.gov.al/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/WEB_Strategjia-Kombetare-EN.pdf

and Violence against Women 2022–2026⁵² in its shared objective of protection against domestic violence and adherence to international standards.⁵³ In North Macedonia, the Programme moulded and advanced strategic priorities, aligning them with the Action Plan for Implementing the Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence 2018–2023.⁵⁴ In this context, the Programme played a critical role in the country's legislative evolution, providing “indispensable technical support to the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy and the Parliament of North Macedonia”.⁵⁵ This collaboration resulted in a comprehensive evaluation of the Convention's impact on existing national legislation, the proposal of a new Law on Prevention and Protection against Gender-Based Violence, and recommended amendments to the Criminal Code and other laws to ensure alignment with the Convention's principles. Similarly, in Serbia and Montenegro, the Programme contributed to implementing EVAW/gender equality priorities, generating a more coherent support framework.

Despite the numerous successes, the Programme also grappled with challenges such as declining trends in policy commitments to gender equality and delays in amending laws related to gender equality and anti-discrimination. An example of this was Serbia's slow enactment of a new Law on Gender Equality between 2016 and 2021. However, the Programme's steadfast commitment to aligning its initiatives with national and regional strategies remained undeterred. Its adaptive and determined approach allowed it to persevere and contribute to a transformative impact in ending violence against women and girls, overcoming hurdles and setting an example of resilience and dedication.

52 Kosovo's National Strategy on Protection against Domestic Violence and Violence against Women 2022–2026 was approved at the 56th Meeting of the Government of Kosovo, Decision 12/56: <https://kryeministri.rks-gov.net/en/blog/national-strategy-on-protection-against-domestic-violence-and-violence-against-women-2022-2026-14-03-2022-2/>

53 These efforts contribute to the stated Government's priority to foster a safer, more equitable society in Kosovo.

54 The Action Plan for Implementation of the Convention on Prevention and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence 2018–2023. This strategic document defines the activities, key institutions, indicators and time frame for incorporating the provisions of the Convention into national legislation for the 2018–2023 period. The main goal of this Plan is to design, implement and coordinate a comprehensive national policy for the prevention and elimination of violence against women.

55 KII notes.

JC2.4. The extent to which the Programme established synergies with larger UN Women portfolios and complemented and coordinated with other interventions and initiatives addressing violence against women and girls in the region

F2.4. The EVAW Regional Programme has demonstrated effective complementarity and coordination with other initiatives addressing violence against women and girls in participating countries and the region. It has established synergies and linkages, adopting a holistic and comprehensive approach to promoting gender equality and eliminating violence.

The Programme's internal coherence was facilitated by the UN Women Regional Office and the Programme Manager. The team effectively planned and coordinated activities, ensuring the active involvement of UN Offices and partners at all levels. Regular communication and meetings facilitated information-sharing, including successes, challenges and lessons learned during implementation. The day-to-day coordination and interaction between the EVAW Regional Programme Team and UN Women activities showcased commendable synergy.

Externally, the Programme's ability to work at the intersection of multiple projects and initiatives was recognized as a strength by development partners. This advantage allowed for knowledge-exchange, resource-pooling and strategy harmonization, enhancing the effectiveness of individual projects and contributing to the broader goal of gender equality and women's empowerment. The ET acknowledges the synergies between the EVAW Programme and the Regional Gender-Responsive Budgeting (GRB) project, which resulted in advancements in the integration of GRB in the area of ending violence against women. This collaboration serves as an example of how strategic coordination can enhance the effectiveness and impact of interventions in addressing VAW and promoting gender equality. In Albania, the United Nations Joint Programme (UNJP) “End Violence Against Women in Albania (EVAWIA)”, partnering with UNDP, UN Women, the United Nations Population Fund and Albania's Ministry of Health and Social Protection, was aligned with national legislation and international gender-based violence against women norms to counteract violence against women. Through collaborative efforts, the EVAWIA initiative has developed vital tools, including standardized protocols for managing domestic and sexual violence cases, while fostering institutional capacity-building. The EVAW Regional Programme consolidates these initiatives by enhancing inter-organizational

collaboration and institutional capacities, fostering policy-conducive environments, and leveraging regional resources. This synergy between regional and local efforts contributes to a comprehensive and more robust strategy for confronting violence against women.

In Montenegro, the EAW Regional Programme's objectives align with those of UNDP's gender-related activities. The Programme has effectively expanded UNDP's work by bringing a regional perspective and additional resources to the country-specific context. Notably, the Programme has complemented UNDP's advocacy for gender equality policies, supported efforts to improve women's access to economic resources, and bolstered implementation of the Women, Peace and Security agenda. The partners stated that UNDP's Gender Portfolio in Montenegro, which spans over two decades of continuous work and strategic partnerships, has additionally facilitated achievements and progress under the EAW framework. Namely, the UNDP Gender Portfolio's efforts in broader social sector reform, digitalization, women's leadership and economic empowerment, and advancing gender mainstreaming in public administration have created an enabling environment for successfully implementing the EAW Programme. The fruitful collaboration and exchange of expertise between the regional Programme and UNDP's established initiatives in Montenegro have played a critical role in achieving these positive outcomes.

Similarly, there are examples from Türkiye. The EAW Regional Programme, during its mandate in Türkiye, aligned with various UN Women activities, creating a comprehensive approach to tackling violence against women. The Programme cooperated with the UN Joint Programme on the Prevention of Child, Early and Forced Marriages, targeting social norms, institutional capacity and policy framework improvements. In addition, the EU built on the EAW Regional Programme's success and initiated a new Türkiye-focused initiative that expanded the EAW results in Türkiye.

Concerning complementarity and coordination with other interventions and initiatives for EAW, Technical Working Groups were an integral coordination mechanism, serving to streamline the strategic approach, communication and collaboration among partners, fostering the alignment of resources, expertise and activities towards shared objectives. This unified approach allowed for greater efficiency, avoiding duplication and enhancing a cohesive response to violence against women. The partners recognized the Programme's coordination efforts, noting the responsive and proactive nature of the Programme Team in organizing needs-based meetings with ongoing interactions on priority topics.

4.3. Effectiveness

The ET analysed the relationship between the results achieved under EAW Regional Programme outputs, reflecting on the extent to which the attainment of outputs contributed to progress under its outcomes.

F3.1. The EAW Regional Programme has been effective in delivering its outputs and making a credible contribution to the achievement of stated outcomes, with primary and secondary sources confirming positive changes in relevant statistical indicators.⁵⁶

The ET prepared a comprehensive analysis of the Programme intervention logic (this included the overall results chain, outcomes and outputs) and respective indicators under each of the elements, striving to establish credible links to the extent possible between specific results and reported progress under the Programme outputs and outcomes. The ET reflected on changes measured by proposed indicators and analysed the extent to which targets have been achieved. In cases of missing information, the FE worked to collect other information and link reported results with outcomes

JC 3.1.1. The extent to which the Regional Programme contributed to an enabling legislative and policy environment (in line with international standards on eliminating violence against women and all forms of discrimination)

F3.1.1. Progress has been made towards Objective 1, creating a legislative and policy environment compatible with international standards for eliminating violence against women and all forms of discrimination.

In the realm of legal and policy changes, strides have been made across the region to align with the Istanbul Convention and CEDAW, and the Programme facilitated these changes. For example, Albania has witnessed revisions to its Law on Measures Against Violence in Family Relations, enabling the removal of perpetrators from households and adopted the Strategy on Gender Equality (2021–2030), including a section on emergency response. Bosnia and Herzegovina has adopted a revised version of the Law on Protection from Domestic Violence and approved the 'person of trust'. In addition, Kosovo's Parliament adopted amendments to the Constitution to ensure the

⁵⁶ The in-depth analysis of the COIII effectiveness has been based on its aggregated progress and monitoring reports, work plans and other prepared analytical reports and documents. The interviews with stakeholders served to validate findings.

direct applicability of the Istanbul Convention. It approved the new Strategy on Protection from Domestic Violence and Violence against Women for 2022–2026. Montenegro adopted the draft of the new National Strategy for Gender Equality 2021–2025 and its Action Plan. The Government of North Macedonia adopted the amendment of the Criminal Code. At the same time, Serbia ratified multiple significant changes, including the Strategy for the Prevention and Combating of Gender-based Violence against Women and Domestic Violence 2021–2025, as well as amendments to the Law on the Prohibition of Discrimination and to the Law on Gender Equality.

In addition to participating in legal and policymaking processes, CSOs and their networks have actively monitored and reported on their implementation. The ET finds that more than 80 CSOs and three networks benefited from the Programme's support to participate in this process. For example, the SOS Network of Vojvodina (in Serbia) collaborated with five women's rights CSOs and gender experts to create an independent report for CEDAW.

Simultaneously, under Objective 1, efforts to raise awareness of violence against women and harmful gender stereotypes have been successful, particularly among marginalized communities. For example, the partners implemented door-to-door campaigns in Kosovo and North Macedonia to reach Roma citizens and enhance their understanding and awareness of various aspects of VAWG and its prevention.

This comprehensive overview confirms that the Programme has been effective in meeting planned targets and coordinating regional and national efforts to create a supportive legislative and policy environment to EVAW.

The Programme has contributed to fortifying women's voice and agency in advocacy for the development and implementation of laws and policies that align with CEDAW and the Istanbul Convention.

With regard to Indicator 1.1.a, there are 145 CSOs and seven networks actively engaged in the monitoring and reporting of the implementation of CEDAW Concluding Observations and the Istanbul Convention. As an example, in Albania the Monitoring Network Against Gender-Based Violence coordinated by the Center for Legal Civic

Initiatives has submitted CEDAW and GREVIO Shadow Reports and UPR reports, monitored three laws and published several declarations and reactions to government institutions' handling of cases of VAW in the country and elicited responses from them.

Under Indicator 1.1.b, the ET found that 33 CSOs focusing on marginalized women are participating in the monitoring and reporting process. For instance, in Kosovo, the Network of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian Women Organizations has been very active, representing over 30 CSOs. Despite facing multiple challenges, they successfully conducted door-to-door campaigns to raise awareness about early marriages, a prevalent form of VAW in their communities. Still, a knowledge gap regarding the international human rights standards on child, early and forced marriages still exists, signalling an area where future efforts can be directed. In Albania, notable progress has been made, including an increased understanding of international commitments among 40 CSO members, thanks to organizations like the Gender Alliance for Development Center. This group has been instrumental in drafting the new National Strategy on Gender Equality, reflecting the Programme's impact at a policy level.

The initiative in North Macedonia, led by organizations like the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights, is focusing on strengthening CSOs for the production of GREVIO shadow reports, increasing national capacity to monitor and report on issues of VAWG.

One of the Programme's significant regional accomplishments was the creation and distribution of comprehensive guidelines, entitled "Promising practices of establishing and providing specialist support services for women experiencing sexual violence."⁵⁷ Led by the regional network "Women Against Violence Europe" (WAVE), this initiative provided a blueprint to support women and girls who are victims of violence. These guidelines encompassed crucial areas such as survivor-centred approaches, confidentiality, informed consent, risk assessment, safety planning and the rights of victims under the Istanbul Convention. Drawing on empirical research, case studies, first-hand accounts and existing literature, these guidelines offered a robust resource for practitioners and policymakers.

To ensure widespread uptake, the guidelines were translated into local languages and distributed to over 150 stakeholders across the region, from frontline service-providers to policymakers. The Programme further organized

57 Available at: https://wave-network.org/wp-content/uploads/WAVE_CSSP_Policypaper210917_web.pdf

a series of training sessions and workshops to delve into the guidelines' application in various contexts, facilitating interactive platforms for stakeholders to exchange experiences, discuss challenges and identify potential solutions. This initiative's real impact, however, would be gauged by the guidelines' adoption and implementation in individual countries and communities. Accordingly, the Programme earmarked monitoring the uptake and use of these guidelines as a primary focus area for future endeavours, contributing substantially to the fight against violence towards women and girls in the region.

For Output 1.2, the objective of "reviewing and reforming laws and policies to conform with international human rights standards, including CEDAW and the Istanbul Convention," progress is visible over the years, additionally confirmed through the indicators. There was a marked enhancement in the normative frameworks regarding gender equality and violence against women across several countries, reflected through the adoption and implementation of more stringent mechanisms and tools (Indicator 1.2.a: Enhancing Normative Frameworks through Implementation Mechanisms and Tools). For example, Albania has clearly pushed towards comprehensive strategies to combat VAW. This commitment is evident in the country's updated Strategy for Gender Equality. In parallel, the country has seen a surge in processed cases related to VAW due to enhanced local referral mechanisms, signalling a more effective response system.

Bosnia and Herzegovina has dedicated efforts towards improving its legal framework around domestic violence (DV). Thorough research on existing DV protection laws has prompted strategic policy proposals influencing budget planning for specialist services in Republika Srpska. The tangible outcomes of this effort include approving a draft Law on Protection from DV by the House of Representatives in the BiH Federation.

Serbia has embarked on a comprehensive mission to eliminate violence against women, drafting and adopting the National Strategy for the Prevention and Elimination of Violence against Women. A parallel analysis of the country's health protection system complemented these efforts by identifying gaps and providing tailored support to victims of VAW. At the same time, Montenegro is striving to meet the Istanbul Convention's standards for DV response. To this end, they have adopted a new National Action Plan as a testament to the nation's dedication towards refining its strategic response to DV, striving for the best practices in the field.

In Kosovo, the Programme facilitated the implementation of innovative legal instruments and strategies to enhance protection against domestic violence. A new National Strategy for Protection against Domestic Violence, a groundbreaking protocol for handling sexual violence cases, a new Law on Protection from DV, and proposed amendments to the Criminal Code all underscore this commitment.

Finally, North Macedonia has focused on evolving its legislative framework to be more responsive to GBV. The Programme partners supported amendments to the Criminal Code and the Gender-Based and Domestic Violence Law preparation. These efforts aim to create gender-aware legislation in line with the provisions of the Istanbul Convention.

Collaboration has been on the regional front to enhance policy development and monitoring (indicator 1.2.b: Regional Cooperation Mechanisms for Policy Development and Joint Monitoring).

Active engagement with the Council of Europe has proven beneficial, exemplified by webinars to deepen understanding of intersectional strategies to reduce VAWG. These sessions brought together diverse stakeholders, including ministry representatives, activists, and members of CSOs. These regional efforts culminated in organizing the Third Regional Forum on Ending Violence against Women, emphasizing the importance of comprehensive policies and inclusive partnerships for the prevention of, and response to, VAWG.

Joint monitoring efforts are also visible across several countries. For example, in Albania, CSOs such as the Gender Alliance for Development Centre and the Albanian Women Empowerment Network have teamed up to boost effectiveness in addressing VAWG. Similarly, in BiH, technical assistance has been provided to refine legislation related to VAWG. These efforts have enhanced victims' protection and increased support for safe houses. In Montenegro, targeted dialogues have led to an Assessment of Costs for specialized services for VAWG victims. At the same time, Serbia has innovatively introduced a mobile application and an integrated SOS Information system, significantly improving service provision for victims.

JC3.1.2. The extent to which the Regional Programme promoted favourable social norms and attitudes to ensure gender equality and prevent discrimination of and violence against women.

F3.1.2. The EVAW Programme ensured progress under Output 2.1. Women’s CSOs, media and government bodies have the knowledge needed to develop and implement innovative approaches to address harmful gender stereotypes, amid the unprecedented challenges brought on by COVID-19. This situation necessitated a shift from conventional advocacy efforts, creating a distinctive communication campaign that harnessed the region’s shared passion for football in the Western Balkans and Türkiye to challenge toxic masculinity and reformulate men’s and boys’ perceptions of VAWG.

The Programme surpassed the initial goal (of six advocacy efforts), as concerted determination led to the launch of more than 20 novel advocacy efforts, all aimed at eradicating damaging gender stereotypes. The partners recognized that “this noteworthy achievement underscored the resilience and adaptability of the Programme (regional) partners, transforming a crisis into an opportunity for out-of-the-box actions”. The formation of a GenderLab is recognized as one of the critical achievements. To this end, the Programme collaborated with the Department of Behavioural Science of Columbia University and delivered an intensive capacity-building programme, amplifying the knowledge of CSO partners to leverage behavioural science principles in combating harmful stereotypes and preventing VAW. Partners recognized that a behavioural change communications campaign “Embracing positive masculinities to promote gender equality and end violence against women – Show that you are in the first league”, which featured famous football players from the Western Balkans and Türkiye and attracted a global audience, was a cornerstone under this innovative approach. The campaign engaged men and boys, challenging harmful beliefs about masculinity. In addition, partners noted that there has been a shift in attitudes among the target group and increased familiarity with critical issues, such as toxic masculinity, violence against women and gender inequality, stating that post-campaign research demonstrated this.⁵⁸

58 Moreover, nearly half of the respondents perceived that the campaign could impact the views of their immediate social circles, highlighting the potential ripple effect of such advocacy initiatives. These efforts can catalyse broader societal change by influencing perceptions within familial and friendship groups.

The Programme made progress under Output 2.2 of the EVAW Programme, which aimed to achieve a shift in the understanding and acceptance of gender equality.

The EVAW Programme utilized the COMBI methodology to drive behavioural change through community mobilization, advocacy efforts and interpersonal communication. By leveraging various channels – such as awareness-raising initiatives, capacity-building workshops, media campaigns, community dialogues and online platforms – the Programme initiated crucial discussions on gender mainstreaming. It actively contributed to reshaping prevailing perceptions and fostering a more nuanced understanding of gender roles and equal opportunities. In Albania, for instance, partners implemented activities to challenge stereotypical gender roles through comprehensive awareness-raising initiatives and student-led initiatives in schools. Collaboration between CSOs and law enforcement bodies (like the Woman Forum Elbasan and the Regional Directory of Police in Elbasan) engaging religious leaders as advocates for gender equality expanded the reach of these initiatives.

Similarly, in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the COMBI campaign targeted police officers⁵⁹ (Tuzla canton) and aimed to improve their response to DV and VAW cases, by providing clear procedural instructions through Guidelines for Police Conduct in DV cases. Partners reported that the rate of requested protective measures increased by 40 percentage points, suggesting a significant shift in institutional attitudes towards DV and VAW⁶⁰ as a result of this support. In Kosovo, efforts focused on developing a Manual on Gender-sensitive Communication Policies⁶¹ to encourage media organizations to counter gender inequality and stereotypes. Joint declarations and high-level consultative

59 Key campaign messages were disseminated through multiple media channels, leading to increased awareness and visibility of the police. The campaign successfully engaged over 1,600 police officers, resulting in behavioural change and the proposal of more protection measures in line with existing VAW legislation.

60 The community outreach effort, including door-to-door campaigns and engagement with citizens, significantly raised awareness of domestic violence in all 13 municipalities of Tuzla Canton. The authorities conducted internal investigations to address the low rate of proposed protection measures in reported DV cases.

61 The partner, Kosovo Gender Studies Center, led on this activity. The Manual on Gender-sensitive Communication Policies empowered governmental actors to fulfil communications objectives related to the National Action Plan on Protection from Domestic Violence.

meetings further reinforced the commitment to combat GBV and stereotypes. In Montenegro, web platforms and electronic databases were developed, and service-providers and beneficiaries were empowered to utilize digital solutions. In North Macedonia, a comprehensive approach was taken, combining media training, school outreach activities and special initiatives for the Roma community to promote gender equality and challenge harmful stereotypes.⁶² In Serbia, the COMBI methodology was implemented in 15 municipalities, reaching millions of people through TV appearances and social media campaigns.⁶³ The Programme also organized workshops and conducted policy and legal research to address the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on VAW, resulting in recommendations to create an environment conducive to challenging traditional gender roles. In Türkiye, innovative strategies were implemented by women CSOs to address toxic gender stereotypes and VAW, including campaigns to reduce school dropout rates and forced child marriages among Syrian girls and increasing fathers' awareness of gender-related issues.

In Türkiye, women's CSOs stated that the Programme supported them to implement innovative strategies to address toxic gender stereotypes and VAW, highlighting a campaign to reduce school dropout rates and forced child marriages among Syrian girls in Mersin⁶⁴ and efforts to increase fathers' awareness of EVAW.⁶⁵

JC3.1.3. The extent to which the Regional Programme empowered women and girls (including those from disadvantaged groups) who have experienced discrimination or violence to advocate for and use available, accessible and quality services

F3.1.3. The EVAW Regional Programme prioritized the implementation of international standards and protocols to support victims of violence. It developed

62 As a result of these efforts, six high schools adopted 'Declarations against GBV', which could signify a shift in the understanding of gender roles and equality among young people. The reported shift in perceptions about gender discrimination among the Roma community indicates progress towards gender equality.

63 A media and online campaign reached a substantial audience, with approximately 3.5 million people exposed to the campaign through TV appearances and over 600,000 impressions on social media.

64 Workshops for social workers and Syrian fathers enhanced their understanding of gender equality and the importance of girls' education. Additional initiatives empowered Syrian girls and raised public awareness through social media and a dedicated website.

65 A "father meetings" programme engaged fathers and encouraged involved fatherhood, resulting in positive changes in parenting behaviours.

comprehensive rulebooks, handbooks, guidelines and recommendations, equipping service-providers with the necessary tools to enhance their response to violence against women. These efforts ensured a standardized and coordinated approach to support services across the region.

The stakeholders recognized that "developing these protocols and standards represented a strategic advancement in strengthening the capacity of service-providers across the region". The opinion is that rulebooks and handbooks provide a comprehensive framework, equipping service-providers with the necessary tools to enhance performance and ensure a consistent and standardized approach to support services, improving overall quality and effectiveness in core areas (e.g., risk assessment, crisis intervention, legal support, psychosocial counselling and referral mechanisms).

Complementing previous deliverables, the Programme partners produced guidelines and tools that offer practical approaches and methodologies to implement evidence-based practices, enhance data collection and monitoring mechanisms, and evaluate the impact of their interventions.

The Programme's support contributed to aligning EVAW-related efforts with the international standards outlined in the CEDAW and Istanbul Convention.

In this context, Albania strengthened the capacities of general and specialist support service-providers to document VAW cases, as required by CEDAW and Istanbul Convention standards. The Programme assisted with strengthening coordination and referral mechanisms, expanding a streamlined pathway for survivors to access necessary psychosocial, health and legal support services. CSOs reported success with the free legal aid, highlighting that nearly 6,000 women sought information and counselling support through the national helpline, while nearly 1,000 received free legal aid, and 100 of them accessed secondary free legal aid through court representation. This support has been available to marginalized groups such as Roma women, women with disabilities, and children. These figures indicate positive strides towards achieving the legal aid standards outlined in CEDAW and the Istanbul Convention.⁶⁶

66 Although it was not the Programme's central focus, efforts have been made to empower women economically as a means to break free from violence. The ET finds that the initiatives supported at least 139 women, while over 70 are now employed.

Similarly, the Programme in Bosnia and Herzegovina boosted service-providers' capacity to identify domestic violence and assess risks to victims. The Programme partners revised protocols on cooperation in response to domestic violence. These revised protocols ensure a standardized and coordinated approach to dealing with cases of violence, meeting CEDAW and Istanbul Convention standards. Furthermore, shelters' capacity was enhanced through the Programme, ensuring that victims of domestic and sexual violence received consistent, quality support, adhering to the prescribed guidelines. Improving coordination bodies and referral mechanisms, especially at the sub-national levels in different regions (despite challenges due to the territorial organization and governance system of the country) has been a notable achievement, allowing for an improved response to domestic violence, aligning better with the standards of the Istanbul Convention and CEDAW.

In Kosovo, the Programme strengthened the capacities of service-providers and domestic violence coordination mechanisms. It also laid out procedures to prevent revictimization, in line with the Istanbul Convention. The Programme also took steps to enhance access to justice, with the Kosovo Law Institute and the Kosovo Gender Studies Centre systematically monitoring court proceedings related to domestic violence. These efforts increased transparency and aligned with CEDAW and Istanbul Convention standards. Furthermore, the Programme helped introduce an online interactive platform offering free legal aid, enhancing access to justice for survivors, a crucial aspect of international standards. Efforts to improve cooperation between women's CSOs for a more comprehensive approach to helping victims of gender-based violence have been reported in Montenegro, adhering to the cooperative standards outlined in the Istanbul Convention and CEDAW. The Programme also conducted awareness-raising efforts through open forums on VAW, ensuring that more people knew about the available services, aligning with the advocacy component of international standards. In addition, the Programme supported initiatives offering free legal aid to women in need, while enhancing the professional capacities of service-providers.

In North Macedonia, specialist services were established for victims of domestic violence outside the capital, Skopje (in the regions of Strumica and Stip). Through targeted capacity-building initiatives, the potential of three CSOs to provide psychosocial counselling services for survivors of VAWG was identified and fostered. In these regions, the Programme supported the establishment of three local multisectoral groups that fostered collaboration and ensured the delivery of quality services to women survivors of violence.

This initiative strengthened coordination among relevant institutions and CSO service-providers, aligning North Macedonia's response to violence against women with the principles and standards of CEDAW and the Istanbul Convention. Partner organizations, such as the Health Education and Research Association, were instrumental in this process, conducting assessments and providing training in collaboration with local women's rights CSOs, leading to enhancement in the capacities of 27 general and specialist service-providers to deliver counselling and psychosocial support as dictated by the Istanbul Convention.

The Programme has been effective in Serbia, supporting a comprehensive set of strategic activities to tackle violence against women and improve support services. Although COVID-19 affected the Programme's scale-up of the Center for Victims of Sexual Violence model to other parts of Serbia, the partners were nevertheless able to upgrade the existing centres to ensure continuous services for women victims of sexual violence. These services included 24/7 comprehensive support, including medical, legal, counselling and social assistance. Furthermore, Serbia made substantial progress in strengthening the capacity of service-provider professionals from social welfare centres, police departments, and health-care institutions to respond to domestic violence cases. Additionally, women's organizations and civil society actors were capacitated through training programmes and workshops, enabling them to play a more active role in supporting survivors, advocating for policy changes, and raising awareness about violence against women. The country also implemented a helpline, the SOS Hotline, to enhance the accessibility of support services for women survivors of violence. Lastly, the partners undertook advocacy initiatives to improve the legal framework, strengthen women's rights protection legislative measures, and promote the ratification and implementation of international conventions like the Istanbul Convention. These measures have resulted in better legal protection for women and stronger accountability for perpetrators of violence.

Progress has been achieved under Output 3.2 of the EAW Regional Programme, focusing on enhancing case management by specialist support service-providers for victims of all forms of violence, emphasizing support for women and girls from minorities and disadvantaged groups.

The accomplishments and achievements in Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, and the regional activities demonstrate the Programme's tangible results in strengthening the knowledge and capacity of service-providers, enhancing data collection and analysis, fostering multisectoral cooperation and promoting a victim-centred approach to case management. The Programme empowered over 1,100 providers with increased knowledge and capacity to manage violence cases in alignment with international standards, far surpassing the target of reaching 30 providers. Key informants recognized this support as "particularly critical for women and girls from minority backgrounds and disadvantaged communities who encounter additional barriers and discrimination when seeking support", emphasizing that the Programme fostered accountability and professionalism among service-providers.

In Montenegro, the Programme has effectively supported partners to establish licensed services for VAW: the partners, NGO CRINK, SOS Niksic and Montenegrin Women's Lobby, obtained licenses for psychosocial counselling services and an SOS hotline for victims. Additionally, capacity-building initiatives have been implemented, including extensive training sessions for service-providers, activists, judges, prosecutors and educators. Furthermore, partners recognized that training support was further expanded through codified knowledge; namely, the Handbook on Mapping Victims' Needs and Developing Individual Support and Protection Plans provided them with a resource to improve case-management practices.

Similarly, in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Programme has improved case management and support services, for example, by supporting members of the Safe Network in preparing the analysis of existing administrative data-collection methods and policies and by developing a database that enhanced record-keeping within safe houses. The ET finds that testing and imminent installation of this software in eight safe houses improved data management and documentation. In addition, the Programme has facilitated multisectoral cooperation at the local and cantonal levels through thematic consultative meetings, bringing together representatives from institutions involved in service-provision, including police, justice, health care, social protection, education and civil society. The key informants highlighted the result of this cooperation through the proposals for amending the Law on protection from domestic violence.

The Programme's efforts in Serbia have prioritized capacity-development, empowering professionals involved in case management, including members of the Groups for Coordination and Cooperation (GCC) and representatives

from public prosecutors' offices. In addition, part of the capacity-development efforts included assistance in preparing individual safety plans. The active participation of the CSO Victimology Society of Serbia in GCC meetings and the subsequent development or amendment of numerous individual safety plans reflected the priority of promoting a coordinated and victim-centred approach to case management. In connection to this, the partners recognized that the Handbook on Mapping Victims' Needs and Developing Individual Support and Protection Plans further contributed to effective case management.

The regional-level efforts to address violence against women and improve case management practices focused on replicating successful models, including establishing a Regional Femicide Watch based on the successful Femicide Watch developed in Serbia. Concerning knowledge-sharing, a particular example has been a documentary series entitled "Justice for Women", which enabled the sharing of real stories and reflection on systemic challenges, triggering discussions on justice reform.

The Regional EAW Programme progressed towards Output 3.3, which aims to enhance access to and improve service-provision for women from minority or disadvantaged groups, addressing the unique challenges and barriers and prioritizing their rights and well-being.

The Programme has been effective under this output, as 19 (out of the 28) capacity-development initiatives involved service-providers who work primarily with or represent minority and disadvantaged groups of women. These initiatives have encompassed training programmes, workshops and information-sharing sessions, equipping providers with the necessary knowledge and skills to deliver culturally sensitive and gender-responsive services. Furthermore, the Programme has strongly emphasized partnering with organizations and individuals who have a direct connection and representation of minority and disadvantaged groups of women. This strategic approach ensured that "capacity-development initiatives have been relevant, targeted and fostered a multidimensional approach to addressing the diverse needs of marginalized women."

In Albania, the Programme supported efforts to empower women from marginalized communities and improve their access to services and resources, delivering

capacity-development support. These efforts included various activities, such as door-to-door campaigns, community meetings and the development of a guide by the Albanian Disability Rights Foundation to provide information on rights and access to services for vulnerable women. Additionally, partner CSOs equipped service-providers in targeted municipalities to provide quality services to survivors of violence from marginalized groups. Furthermore, the Programme supported partners in policy advocacy and their contributions to analytical frameworks to improve the legal framework and promote inclusivity. Similarly, In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Programme focused on enhancing the access to and quality of services for women from minority or disadvantaged groups, especially Roma women, building the capacity of service-providers.⁶⁷ This improved capacity enabled service-providers to adopt a multisectoral approach and to collaborate effectively with institutions and CSOs. In addition, the Network of Roma Women led advocacy initiatives resulting in the development of policy papers addressing their rights, leading to the formulation of action plans for the inclusion of Roma men and women. The Programme piloted economic reintegration opportunities to support women survivors on their journey towards independence.

The Programme prioritized improving access to justice and specialist services for women from minority or disadvantaged groups in Kosovo, providing technical assistance to shelters supporting victims of violence, improving services, including counselling and legal assistance for survivors. Economic reintegration initiatives, such as vocational training programmes, were implemented to empower survivors and enhance their chances of becoming economically independent. The Programme supported partners/service-providers collaborating with government institutions and the private sector, creating a more favourable environment for survivors' employment. Activities that contributed to raising awareness and fostering dialogue on the challenges of women from marginalized backgrounds complemented these efforts.

In North Macedonia, the Programme adopted a holistic approach to supporting survivors, their recovery and well-being. These efforts included economic reintegration through a social mentoring programme, enabling women to secure employment and improve their financial situations.⁶⁸ In addition, the Programme supported partners to

67 As a result, 80 representatives including State and non-State actors have gained a better understanding of the discriminatory institutional practices faced by marginalized women.

68 This programme supported 15 women who had experienced violence and faced long-term unemployment and single parenthood, leading to improved skills, increased self-confidence and enhanced financial situations.

put in place psychosocial counselling centres to provide comprehensive support to survivors, focusing on women with disabilities and those from minority groups. In parallel, service-providers received capacity-building assistance to enable effective psychosocial counselling services.⁶⁹

In Serbia, the Programme focused on empowering Roma women survivors of violence through economic reintegration initiatives, developing a comprehensive model and equipping them with skills and qualifications for employment.⁷⁰ Complementary to this, partners organized capacity-building initiatives for service-providers and workshops addressing women's health, mental well-being and the consequences of violence.⁷¹ Finally, Programme partners collaborated with stakeholders and policymakers to promote the rights and well-being of marginalized women.

In Türkiye, the Programme supported CSOs to promote access to justice and specialist services for vulnerable women, particularly Syrian women and those with low literacy levels. The partners developed and implemented an awareness-raising module on legal rights and delivered it through community-based organizations.

JC3.2.1. Existence of unexpected changes, both positive and negative, that beneficiaries and other key stakeholders perceive as being the result of the programme's activities

F3.2.1. The ERAW Regional Programme has generated several unforeseen positive outcomes during its implementation, demonstrating adaptability, influence and capacity for innovation.

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the ERAW Regional Programme demonstrated agility and adaptability by swiftly expanding its online tools and mobile applications. Recognizing the challenges posed by the pandemic, the

69 Specialized psychosocial counselling centres were established in the South-East region of North Macedonia. These centres have served 249 women and girls who are survivors of violence, particularly those with disabilities, from minority groups and residing in rural areas. Including financial provisions for the counselling centre in the municipal Local Action Plan for Gender-Based Violence has ensured the sustainability of services in the region.

70 Working in partnership with the CSO Roma Women Center Bibija, the project successfully trained and equipped 50 Roma women from various municipalities with valuable skills and qualifications. These women have completed training courses in tailoring, manicure/pedicure, book-keeping, makeup artistry and more, creating opportunities for entry into the labour market and fostering economic independence.

71 These transformative workshops emphasized the importance of education and economic empowerment for survivors, identifying at least 50 individuals as potential beneficiaries of the project's economic reintegration model.

Programme strategically invested in digital responses to bridge the digital gender divide and ensure that women and girls could still access support services. These digital solutions were designed to complement traditional offline interventions, recognizing that they were not meant to replace offline support entirely but rather provide alternative means of reaching out to those in need when the offline provision was not possible.

By prioritizing investments in digital responses, the Programme aimed to address the disparities in access to technology and ensure that marginalized groups were not left behind. The Programme and its partners acknowledged individuals' diverse needs and circumstances and the potential for technology to exacerbate existing gaps. The Programme offered a comprehensive support system that combined digital innovations with traditional offline interventions to prevent further disparities. Telephone hotlines, drop-in centres and community-based support services were maintained to provide accessible offline options, ensuring inclusivity and equity in addressing violence against women.

Furthermore, the Programme fostered robust collaboration and inter-organizational partnerships, which led to functional networks and expanded synergies in the fight against GBV and discrimination. The Programme's collaborative approach strengthened alliances with CSOs and other stakeholders, enabling a more comprehensive and united effort to address violence against women and promote gender equality. The support provided by the Programme empowered CSOs to contribute to policy and legislative changes, advocating for gender equality and promoting women's rights.

In addition, the Programme's efforts have contributed to a broader understanding of different forms of violence within the participating countries, particularly among officials and referral mechanisms. Advocacy supported legislative reforms and proposed changes in national laws related to violence against women, demonstrating the Programme's influence in shaping legal frameworks and policies. Moreover, the regional approach of the Programme has fostered greater solidarity among the Western Balkan countries, as they collectively work towards EU accession and alignment with the standards set by the Istanbul Convention. This shared sense of purpose and unity has underscored the strategic advantage of a unified regional goal and cooperation among countries in addressing violence against women.

While the Programme emphasized supporting CSOs and the women they serve, it also recognized the need for greater direct and strategic involvement from State institutions. The participation and ownership of State authorities are crucial for sustainable capacities, institutional change and scaling of initiatives.

Limited participation and ownership among governing institutions may compromise the long-term sustainability and impact of the Programme. Therefore, comprehensive stakeholder engagement, with State stakeholders taking a leading role, assuming ownership and fostering coordination, is necessary to effectively address these challenges and ensure the continuity and success of efforts to end violence against women.

The Programme demonstrated comprehensive, well-rounded, and multi-pronged strategies to address complex issues under the ERAW framework, with 'Strengthening Women's Organizations' at its heart. This approach ensured a dynamic and mutually reinforcing interaction between different strategies, amplifying their collective ERAW efforts.

The Programme designed and implemented strategies to tackle the multifaceted and deep-seated issues of gender-based violence and discrimination. Notably, the Programme did not apply these distinct strategies as stand-alone approaches. Instead, it enabled them to dynamically interact and reinforce each other, culminating in a synergistic effect that amplifies their (individual) impacts.

At the fulcrum of the Programme's strategies is the concept of 'Strengthening Women's Organizations'. This central strategy laid the groundwork, invigorating local entities intrinsically linked to their communities. Empowering these organizations equipped them to tackle diverse challenges with unique insights and locally relevant solutions, creating ripples of change that echo throughout the Programme's other strategic components. The enhanced capacity of these organizations significantly boosts the Programme's 'Influencing Laws and Policies' strategy. Evidence of this comes from the credible and targeted advocacy they bring to the table, helping to drive essential amendments to laws and policies safeguarding women's rights. The

resulting legal and policy landscape improvements reciprocally foster a more supportive environment for these organizations, initiating a virtuous cycle of empowerment and transformation.

The interconnectedness between 'Challenging Norms and Exclusionary Practices' and 'Increasing Access to Women-Centered Quality Essential Services' is another testament to the Programme's comprehensive approach. Providing accessible, quality services aid the immediate needs of women and gradually chips away at entrenched norms that have long allowed the persistence of violence and discrimination. In this scenario, the strengthened women's organizations often act as frontline service-providers, thereby enhancing their direct impact on women's lives. Simultaneously, the 'Influencing Laws and Policies' strategy feeds into 'Challenging Norms and Exclusionary Practices'. As the critical laws protecting women are established and enforced, society receives a clear signal that discriminatory norms and violent behaviours will be processed and punished (and not tolerated). This sends a potent message to society, thereby contributing to dismantling harmful norms.

Despite this intricate tapestry of mutual reinforcement, a balance in implementing these strategies characterized the Programme's implementation. Additionally, while 'Strengthening Women's Organizations' plays a pivotal role, the participation of State institutions and other stakeholders is vital to ensure the long-term sustainability of the Programme's achievements.

JC3.3. The extent to which factors and Programme implementation strategies facilitated or affected the implementation of the Programme and the achievement of results

F3.3.1. The positive factors represent the confluence of regional commitment, strong networking, determined action against VAW, alignment with EU policies, agility in the face of global crisis and substantial policy influence. Collectively, they provide a testament to the resilience, adaptability and effectiveness of the ERAW Programme. These elements together construct a compelling narrative of a robust Programme that is making strides towards its mission of eliminating violence against women.

On the positive side, the Programme has been bolstered by a strong regional commitment, effective networking, and a resolute stance against VAW, and femicide in particular.

This regional focus has harmonized efforts and created a more impactful approach towards addressing VAW. In addition, the cultivation of robust CSO networks, which have provided invaluable insights into local social dynamics and the specific needs of beneficiaries, further enhanced the Programme's effectiveness.

The EU's strategic orientation towards addressing VAW has played a catalysing role, providing a solid point of reference and motivation for the participating IPA countries.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Programme demonstrated resilience and agility, swiftly adapting to leverage online tools and mobile applications for remote support, emphasizing the importance of continued access and quality services for victims of violence.

F3.3.2. The ERAW Regional Programme has faced challenges due to intertwined social, cultural, economic and political factors.

Deep-seated cultural norms and entrenched gender inequality continue to propagate gender discrimination and violence, posing significant obstacles to achieving the Programme's objectives. These pervasive beliefs contribute to perpetuating violence and foster a culture of victim-blaming, underscoring the need for a comprehensive approach involving consistent and sustainable engagement, educational and awareness-raising initiatives.

Resource constraints and political challenges in participating countries have hampered the implementation of integrated policies to combat VAW, underscoring the need for adequate resource allocation and stable political environments. Sustaining and enhancing political will towards eliminating VAW is a daunting challenge, especially in political instability and conflict contexts, necessitating continuous efforts to keep these issues at the forefront of political dialogue.

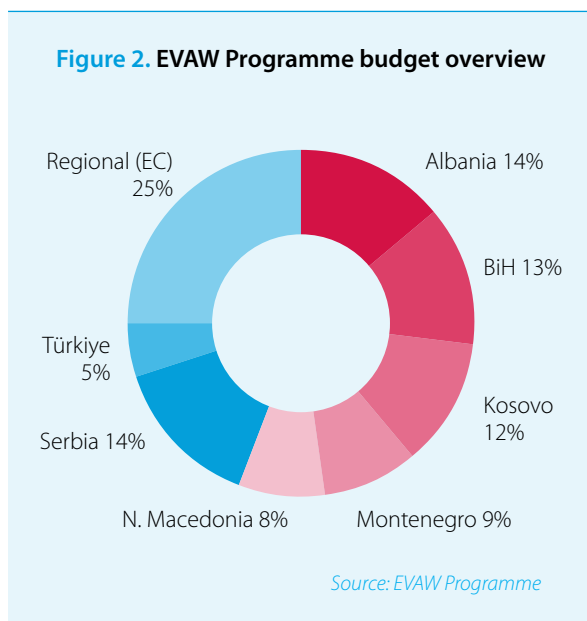
All countries have generally adopted legal frameworks for ERAW; however, the implementation of laws remain less apparent, hindering the identification, reporting and punishment of crimes against women. Addressing these problems requires a comprehensive and multifaceted "whole of society" approach that reacts to immediate needs and addresses systemic issues.

4.4. Efficiency

JC4.1. The extent to which resources (financial, human, technical support, etc.) have been allocated strategically to achieve the Programme outcomes?

F4.1. The EAW Programme has efficiently delivered resources to achieve its outcomes, as evidenced by the substantial budget allocation, relatively high delivery and utilization rates, strategic allocation and positive outcomes.

The financial figures indicate substantial funds allocated to the EAW Programme across participating countries, demonstrating a solid commitment and recognition of the importance of addressing violence against women and promoting gender equality. The budget reflects recognition of the scale and complexity of the issue at hand, indicating serious intent to address it effectively.



The external environment, in-country situation and responsiveness to administrative processes may influence the varying delivery rates across countries. The fact that most countries have delivery rates above 90 per cent suggests a relatively efficient delivery of allocated funds. It implies that the Programme has been successful in disbursing funds to the intended recipients and implementing the planned activities within the specified timeframes. In addition, the Programme has recorded relatively high utilization rates indicating that the Programme effectively used allocated funds to implement the activities and interventions under the Programme.

The cumulative fund utilization rate for the overall EC funds during the specified period (1 February 2020 to 19 May 2023) is 95.55 per cent. This reflects efficient budget management and successful Programme implementation across all participating countries, highlighting a collective commitment to addressing violence against women and promoting gender equality in the region.

The cumulative fund utilization rate for each country (from 1 February 2020 to 19 May 2023) are as follows: Kosovo 99.38 per cent; Albania 97.36 per cent; North Macedonia 97.12 per cent; Bosnia and Herzegovina 95.92 per cent; Serbia 94.77 per cent; and for the regional component 90.04 per cent. Notably, the cumulative fund utilization rate in Montenegro was 100.00 per cent. This indicates full utilization of the delivered funds, demonstrating optimally efficient budget management and successful implementation of programme activities to combat violence against women and promote gender equality. Moreover, the overall high utilization rates show efficient budget management, successful implementation of programme activities, and ongoing efforts to manage and allocate funds effectively. It equally indicates solid State-level buy-in and dedication to ending VAW and achieving gender equality.

The ET finds that the EAW Programme allocated resources strategically. The analysis highlights the Programme's ability to adapt to the COVID-19 pandemic, support survivors, prioritize cooperation, scale up initiatives, engage with stakeholders and leave no one behind, demonstrating the effectiveness of the allocated resources. These outcomes indicate that the resources were efficiently utilized to achieve the Programme's goals and make a positive difference in the lives of women affected by violence.

JC4.2. The extent to which the leadership and management of the Programme, including the structuring of management and administration roles, have been effective

F4.2.1. The Regional Programme has established a clear workplan and has completed planned activities/ progressed towards targets within the approved budget.

The EAW Regional Programme established a dedicated implementation team to carry out its activities effectively. The Programme Manager (PM) was at the team's helm, who provided overall leadership and ensured smooth implementation. The PM possessed high-level managerial skills and deep expertise in gender equality and women's empowerment, making them well-equipped to guide the Programme. Reporting directly to the Deputy Regional

Director, the PM's responsibilities encompassed various tasks, including overseeing regional activities, providing technical oversight, monitoring and evaluating progress, and managing financial and human resources. Additionally, the PM fostered collaborations with regional and inter-governmental organizations, development partners, and women's organizations platforms, ensuring strategic alignment with the broader UN Women framework.

The skilled Programme Analyst (PA) was critical in providing financial, administrative and programmatic support. The team members recognized that the "PA's competencies helped align the Programme with UN Women and European Commission's rules and regulations", "ensuring operational assistance and unwavering support to the PM and team members in participating countries". Additionally, a Communications and Visibility Consultant was part of the team, responsible for coordinating advocacy, communication and knowledge-management efforts.

The Programme also appointed Technical Programme Analysts (TPAs) to oversee the day-to-day implementation of activities in each participating country. In Montenegro, UNDP engaged a full-time Project Coordinator. The TPAs provided daily technical assistance, mentoring and support to CSO beneficiaries, fostering partnerships and collaboration with stakeholders such as EU delegations, CSOs and governments. They also coordinated closely with the Programme Manager on technical matters related to the regional Programme's implementation. The ET recognized that the TPAs played a crucial role in promoting synergies and coordination of activities at the country level. Although the Programme experienced occasional turnover of TPAs across the seven countries, the involvement of UN Women staff in these offices ensured continuity in these critical roles.

The strong operational and technical interaction and communication within the EAW Regional Programme team, particularly between the PM and TPAs, contributed to enhanced effectiveness and results delivery throughout the Programme's implementation. Key informants emphasized the importance of the Programme team's technical knowledge and management capacities in effectively addressing complex situations related to violence against women in participating countries. Led by the skilled PM, the EAW Programme Team successfully mobilized resources, facilitated the delivery of results, and maintained regular communication and information exchange with CSOs, authorities and other partners to ensure alignment with strategic priorities.

F4.2.2. The EAW Programme incorporated results-oriented annual plans and more detailed monthly plans, providing a solid basis for scheduling, resource allocation, budget control and achievement of results.

The EAW Programme adopted results-oriented annual and monthly workplans, providing a solid foundation for scheduling, resource allocation, budget control and the achievement of desired outcomes. These comprehensive workplans facilitated the planning, implementation and synchronization of activities, ensuring alignment with country priorities and the identified needs of partners and participating institutions. The preparation of workplans was a participatory process, involving the joint efforts of the EAW Programme team and partners.⁷²

The Programme demonstrated successful collaboration and synergy with other initiatives in the region. For instance, in Albania, fruitful cooperation was established with the UN joint project "End Violence Against Women in Albania." This partnership empowered CSOs and National Human Rights Institutions to promote accountability among service-providers, engage men and boys in violence prevention, and strengthen existing perpetrator programmes.⁷³ The Programme's workplans facilitated coordination with experts, missions and capacity-development activities, further enhancing the overall impact.

F4.2.3. The steering structure (overall Programme level) and coordination mechanisms (at the level of participating countries) have been established in a timely manner and have contributed to efficient and effective implementation

To ensure effective implementation, the Programme established a Programme Steering Committee (PSC) as the main advisory and steering structure. The PSC consisted of key stakeholders, including representatives from UN Women, the Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations, the Council of Europe, the European Institute for Gender Equality, and CSOs. The annual virtual meetings of the PSC provided a platform for discussing progress, verifying achievements, addressing challenges and proposing improvements. The PSC's diverse representation ensured alignment with strategic objectives, maximizing efforts to prevent and address violence against women in the Western Balkans region.

The Technical Working Groups played a crucial role in streamlining programmatic implementation at the country level. Composed of representatives from the EU, UN Women, relevant national institutions/ministries and

⁷² KII notes with the national stakeholders.

⁷³ <https://albania.un.org/en/113036-end-violence-against-women-albania-evaw-joint-programme>

selected CSO partners, the TWGs held regular meetings to align objectives, share concerns and exchange ideas. These meetings also served as platforms for updates on legislative developments and the Programme's progress.

Overall, these coordination mechanisms, including the PSC and TWGs, fostered collaboration, cohesion and information-exchange among diverse stakeholders, enhancing the effectiveness and impact of the ERAW Programme's support.

F4.2.4. The ET finds that partners recognized that the Regional Programme established itself as a brand,⁷⁴ achieving acclaim and visibility in supporting the elimination of violence against women and girls in the Western Balkans (and Türkiye).

The ERAW Programme demonstrated a high standard of communication, effectively disseminating key messages through various channels and tailored approaches. Roundtable discussions, media collaborations and participation in events ensured that the Programme's messages reached diverse audiences, including decision-makers, beneficiaries and the general public. This approach fostered impactful dialogue, engaging stakeholders such as CSOs, government authorities and the wider public. The Programme's commitment to open and inclusive dialogue allowed for broad discussions on violence against women, promoting preventive and recovery measures. This dynamic communication platform nurtured collaborative relationships, raised public awareness, and maintained transparency and accountability.

Concerning knowledge-generation and management, the Programme excelled in its reporting structure. It produced substantive and informative reports, serving as a virtual knowledge repository that documented activities, results and long-term effects. The reports featured innovative technology, with embedded hyperlinks leading to additional supporting documents, enhancing the reader's understanding. The Programme's dedicated website further provided a wide range of critical documents, including research publications, guidelines, document outlines, an online monthly newspaper and other resources.⁷⁵ This comprehensive online repository of knowledge enhanced transparency, facilitated collaborations and promoted learning among stakeholders. The Programme's adept use of digital technology showcased its commitment to freely accessible knowledge and effective mission achievement.

74 KII national partners.

75 See more at: <https://eca.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/ending-violence-against-women/regional-programme-in-the-western-balkans-and-turkey>

4.5. Sustainability

JC5.1. The likelihood that the benefits from the Programme will be maintained for a reasonably long period of time after the Programme phase out

F5.1. The likelihood of the Programme's benefits being maintained over a reasonably long duration post its phase-out seems promising, yet it is not without risk. Numerous factors threaten the sustainability of the Programme's results. One such factor is the slow pace of implementing policies and legal frameworks for ERAW. Despite progress, there are still challenges in harmonizing national legislation with international standards, including the targets and recommendations of the Istanbul Convention and GREVIO. The EU accession process, which plays a significant role in shaping policy and legislation, is also experiencing delays, casting uncertainty on the sustainability of the Programme's achievements.

Implementing effective cooperation mechanisms and accountability among authorities is another critical factor for sustainability. Weak cooperation mechanisms and low accountability can hinder the implementation and enforcement of policies and undermine the continuity of support services for victims. Additionally, the availability of resources for CSOs and the delivery of essential services to survivors of violence are crucial for sustaining the Programme's impact. If these resources diminish or become unpredictable, the ability to provide comprehensive support and maintain progress will be compromised.

Despite these challenges, there are reasons to be optimistic about the sustainability of the Programme's policy-level developments. Governments in the participating countries have shown commitment to international and EU-accession-related standards, creating a favourable environment for sustaining efforts to address gender-based violence and inequality. The Programme has played a significant role in strengthening legal and policy frameworks in several countries. For example, it has contributed to developing national strategies, aligning legislation with the Istanbul Convention, and supported dedicated institutions to address GBV. These achievements indicate a positive trajectory and suggest a higher likelihood of sustainability at the policy level.

Furthermore, the Programme's impact on partner institutions' operational and technical capacities has been instrumental in building specialized knowledge and

delivering holistic assistance to victims. CSOs and women's organizations have benefited from the Programme's organizational development, strategic planning and policy advocacy support. By fostering collaboration and coordination among these organizations, the Programme has facilitated a more comprehensive and united approach to addressing violence against women. The well-established foundations and proven abilities of CSOs provide a solid basis for sustaining their capacity to deliver priority services and contribute to the broader efforts to combat violence against women.

However, there are potential risks to the sustainability of CSOs' work. Growing anti-gender sentiments and the rise of radical and religious movements can challenge their functioning and efficacy. These sociopolitical changes may restrict the operational space of CSOs, undermine their efforts and impede progress in addressing violence against women. Therefore, it is essential to closely monitor and respond to these shifts in the political landscape to ensure that CSOs can continue their vital work effectively.

JC5.2. The extent to which stakeholders' ownership and capacities at the regional and country level have been developed to ensure sustainability of efforts and benefits

F5.2.1. Several factors support the Programme's success and sustainability. First, the ownership and engagement of stakeholders, including CSOs, national authorities and strategic institutions, played a critical role. These stakeholders recognized the importance of addressing gender-based violence and actively participated in the Programme's activities and decision-making processes. Through their involvement, the Programme's priorities were set in line with national needs and policies, ensuring a demand-driven approach to implementation.

CSOs demonstrated increased ownership and engagement by actively identifying their needs and formulating responses. This ownership was crucial for the Programme's success, leading to organizational development, cooperation and knowledge transfer within the CSO sector. The Programme facilitated partnerships between CSOs and authorities, strengthening their collaboration in delivering services and advocating for policy changes. The involvement of CSOs ensured that the initiatives reflected the genuine demand for services and prioritized the needs of vulnerable groups, such as women and girls with disabilities or Roma women and girls.

The Programme's success in policy-level developments was also notable. The Programme influenced the development

of legal and policy frameworks in several countries. For instance, in Kosovo, technical aid from the Programme led to the development of the National Strategy for Protection against Domestic Violence and an extensive domestic violence database. In Albania, the Programme contributed to measures against gender violence within the new Strategy on Gender Equality. The Programme supported aligning the Criminal Code with the Istanbul Convention in North Macedonia.⁷⁶ These policy changes showcased the Programme's effectiveness in bolstering legal and policy frameworks.

While these advancements in policy are promising, their sustainability is not without risks. Slow implementation of legislative changes and the harmonization of national legislation with international standards pose challenges to the long-term sustainability of these policy achievements. Continued efforts are needed to ensure these policies' effective implementation and enforcement.

The Programme also fostered partnerships at the regional and country levels. Regional collaborations, such as the Regional Forum on Ending Violence against Women in the Western Balkans and Türkiye,⁷⁷ facilitated knowledge-sharing and informal dialogue on the Istanbul Convention and practices related to ending violence against women and girls. Partnerships with organizations like the CoE and the EIGE strengthened understanding of, and commitment to, implementing international standards and recommendations. These efforts included regional coordination and expert meetings⁷⁸ to develop guidelines for strengthening VAWG data systems.⁷⁹

76 The amended Criminal Code defines GBV against women and criminalizes a number of different types of violence, including: femicide, female genital mutilation, stalking and sexual harassment. The changes also expand the definition of sexual violence to include online and non-consensual sexual acts and rape, and the rape of a current or previous spouse or intimate partner. The Criminal Code is revised as a result of the Programme's support to the Centre for Research and Policy Making.

77 For example, delivery of the capacity-development activity "A thousand ways to solve our problems: Preventing and responding to violence against women from an intersectional perspective in the Western Balkans and Türkiye".

78 On 24–25 October 2022, the programme participated in the Gender Equality Forum 2022, organized by EIGE.

79 At the 12th Regional Coordination Meeting of EU candidate countries and potential candidates on 19 May 2021, organized by EIGE and funded by the European Commission, stakeholders from the Western Balkans and Türkiye gathered to discuss the current gender equality priorities in the EU and the impact and challenges of COVID-19 for gender equality. Also, on 30 June 2021, a Regional Experts Meeting from Western Balkans and Türkiye discussed the draft Guidelines on Strengthening Data System on Violence Against Women.

The Regional Forum held discussions on strategies for establishing femicide watches or observatories in the region, enhancing alliances among women's rights organizations and governments, and improving referral systems for survivors of violence.⁸⁰ Operationally, the Programme supported the establishment of a regional Femicide Watch, based on a successful model from Serbia,⁸¹ facilitating partnership between Femplatz (Serbia) with the Centre for Legal Civic Initiatives in Albania and SOS Niksic in Montenegro to develop a comprehensive understanding of femicide. They analysed in-depth cases of femicide and attempted femicide from court decisions and media reports to identify patterns and common challenges, such as systemic data-collection and data quality issues. Following extensive research and advocacy based on these findings, the governments in these countries committed to tackle femicide and consider options for national femicide watches.⁸²

At the country level, the Programme established Technical Working Groups to coordinate stakeholders and streamline efforts to combat violence against women and girls. These TWGs served as platforms for coordination, collaboration and information exchange among diverse stakeholders. Notably, the TWGs enhanced collaboration among CSOs through the Network for Monitoring Violence Against Women in Albania, ensuring a more effective response to violence.

The Programme also emphasized synergies with other initiatives, maximizing the impact of its interventions. Collaborations with the UN Joint Programme on Ending

Violence Against Women in Albania and the UK-funded project on ending violence against women in Serbia expanded the scope of activities and enhanced coordination among stakeholders. These partnerships facilitated knowledge-exchange, avoided duplication of efforts, and fostered synergies in addressing violence against women and girls.

The Programme's success can be attributed to stakeholder ownership, demand-driven approaches and strategic partnerships. The active involvement of CSOs and other stakeholders, their contributions to resources and expertise, and their commitment to addressing violence against women and promoting gender equality have been crucial. By fostering ownership, promoting collaboration and leveraging synergies, the Programme has made significant strides in combating violence against women and improving the lives of those affected in participating countries.

F5.2.2. The ET analysed the potential for civil society in participating countries to retain or even amplify their proactive stance in light of the results and changes the Programme delivered. However, the sustainability of these results is contingent upon CSOs' continued involvement and active role in critical activities related to EVAW, which, in turn, relies on external (government, local authorities or development partners) support in financing their services and a willingness to engage CSOs in various activities.

In most countries reviewed, public funding for specialist support services for women victims of violence is insufficient, forcing many women's CSOs providing specialist services to rely on continuous fundraising, volunteer work and unpaid labour. The situation varies between countries, with differing levels of funding allocated to shelters and support services. Access to employment and economic empowerment programmes for victims, supported through municipal and national budgets, remains minimal in all visited countries.

Furthermore, CSOs unequivocally recognized the challenges to continuing with their activities, stating that "the COVID-19 pandemic, coupled with an adverse economic situation in all participating countries, harms the continuity of essential services for victims of violence". During this global health crisis, the fiscal constriction of local and national budgets led to a substantial decrease in funds designated for social services. Consequently, the imperative of addressing violence against women was deprioritized amid the pressing competition for limited resources.

In the face of these formidable challenges, CSOs struggled to maintain services. Partners recognized that the EVAW Regional Programme's critical role in supporting services

80 The Regional Forum on Ending Violence against Women was held in the Western Balkans and Türkiye on 29–30 November 2022, attracting over 300 participants from diverse sectors. Discussions focused on establishing femicide watches in the region, strengthening networks between women's rights organizations and governments, and improving referral systems for violence survivors. A primary outcome was formulating practical strategies for creating femicide watches at country and subregional levels. Also, the first interactive femicide map in the region was launched by Femplatz, marking over 100 femicides since 2020 and serving as a public, transparent tool. <https://eca.unwomen.org/en/news-and-events/events/2022/10/fourth-regional-forum-on-ending-violence-against-women-in-the-western-balkans-and-turkiye-integrated-policies-inclusive-partnerships>

81 See more at: <https://femplatz.org/index.php>

82 The ET finds that the Albanian Government, in its answer to the UN Special Rapporteur on VAW to provide information on the implementation of the Femicide Watch Initiative, stated its support to the UN Women project of Femplatz in collaboration with Albanian sub-partners to set up a national femicide watch and/or observatory on violence against women with a femicide watch role. In Serbia, the Government even defined femicide as the most severe form of violence against women and established an official monitoring and analysis mechanism for femicide cases.

during the height of the crisis could not be overstated, pointing out that this support revealed vulnerabilities in the existing structures for addressing violence against women. Namely, the Programme effectively acted as a stop-gap measure in the face of financial constraints. However, reliance on this emergency support has underscored a broader issue: the tenuous nature of services' sustainability without consistent, long-term financial backing.

The continuity and effectiveness of these services beyond the Programme's lifespan is a pressing issue. For example, authorities from various governance structures (non-CSO stakeholders) expect CSOs to strive for financial independence, advising that CSOs offer various pay-for and commercial services to mobilize funding for activities, including service provision, advocacy and lobbying. The ET finds that these suggestions are not aligned with Istanbul Convention and EU standards. Adding to these challenges is the economic downturn due to a decrease in international development assistance and dwindling allocations for social services from national and local budgets. Such constraints can critically impact these organizations, threatening the sustainability of their services. The looming financial insecurity underscores the importance of fortifying sustainable funding sources, strengthening political backing, and boosting public awareness and engagement in these crucial issues. Without the commitment of long-term external funding – whether from government sources, municipal resources or development support – these services could face substantial difficulties in maintaining operations, leaving victims of violence without the crucial support they need.

JC5.3. The extent to which the participation of CSOs and women's organizations has been institutionalized in national and regional dialogue and decision-making spaces as a result of the Programme interventions

F5.3.1. The Programme has supported cooperation mechanisms and regional dialogue; however, the analysis reveals a lack of institutionalized and formalized CSO participation mechanisms at the regional level.

The Regional Forum on Ending Violence against Women in the Western Balkans and Türkiye garnered positive feedback, albeit while offering a 'soft' exchange of experiences and information. There is no regional interinstitutional government-CSO dialogue mechanism encompassing the Western Balkans and Türkiye beyond the well-received

Regional Forum, which is currently the sole mechanism promoting regional interactions on EVAWG-related topics among national gender equality mechanisms, CSOs and European institutions.

However, the Regional Forum isn't designed to maintain results or regional decision-making after the Programme's conclusion. Still, key informants recognized UN Women's role in addressing the insufficiency of regional forums, suggesting that it continue facilitating cooperation processes with the goal of establishing a formal regional cooperation mechanism. (Informal) regional networks of women's organizations could potentially maintain EVAW advocacy benefits with sustainable funding and consistent member participation.

The ET finds that for a regional mechanism to advance and maintain results, there is a need to consider options beyond 'soft' cooperation and include more robust methods of replication, scaling and mixed decision-making bodies involving government, civil society and other stakeholders. These bodies should have the authority to develop regional frameworks instead of merely offering recommendations to multiple countries.

F5.3.2. There are positive examples of CSOs' and women's organizations' institutionalization in national and subnational dialogue and decision-making spaces as a result of the Programme. However, these interinstitutional mechanisms are inconsistent throughout the Western Balkans and Türkiye.

There are a few examples of effective national inter-institutional mechanisms that can maintain achieved results, engaging governments, CSOs and other stakeholders. However, the ET finds that "these mechanisms lack the necessary human resources and even more frequently financial support". Furthermore, CSO participation in some of these mechanisms has been ad hoc and in some cases without genuine influence: the CSOs occasionally participate in temporary bodies for strategy designing or law drafting consultations or ad-hoc structures for progress monitoring (in Albania and Serbia, for example). Still, these structures and mechanisms have minimal impact on the sustainability of results.

In some cases, multi-agency coordination mechanisms involving authorities and service-providers, including CSOs and other partners, proved effective in achieving results. These consolidated efforts, capacity-development and coordination emphasized improving referral mechanisms and collaboration to address gender-based violence across participating countries. In addition, these

partnerships paved the way for advocacy initiatives that prompted changes in legislation and the establishment of guidelines for better handling domestic violence cases. For example, in Albania, organizations like the Human Rights in Democracy Center and the Albanian Women Empowerment Network facilitated the training of service-providers, bolstering their ability to effectively respond to and refer to cases of violence against women. Also, a cooperation agreement between a CSO partner and the Regional Police Directorate ensured smooth collaboration and information exchange on reported violence cases. In Albania, the Network for Monitoring the Elimination of Violence against Women expanded its influence and enhanced member organizations' monitoring (for example, monitoring of the critical laws, such as the Law on Social Housing; Law on Free Legal Aid and Law on Domestic Violence that were finalized and published, and findings presented). Moreover, it enhanced its advocacy capacities by representing its members' work and collective achievements in workshops, conferences and meetings at national, regional and international levels.⁸³ Bosnia and Herzegovina saw similar capacity-building efforts, with the Safe Network and Lara Bijeljina enhancing the efficiency of multisectoral teams across several regions. Meanwhile, Kosovo focused on improving its Municipal Domestic Violence Coordination Mechanisms, spearheaded by the Shelter "Liria" programme, which orchestrated workshops resulting in actionable strategies for better service-delivery.

The ET finds that CSOs have participated in Universal Periodic Review mechanisms in all countries; the stakeholders recognized that "CSOs' participation in the UPR process is crucial in promoting and protecting human rights, ensuring transparency and accountability, and advocating for positive change in their respective countries". However, the UPR mechanism's stability relies on regular support from UN human rights entities and government mechanisms established with civil society participation. The dynamic involvement of civil society in reporting on CEDAW and the Istanbul Convention will depend on support from the UN or other international agencies.

The ET finds – and stakeholders confirmed – that the establishment of these mechanisms and networks is a crucial step towards achieving gender equality and ending violence against women in the Western Balkans and Türkiye.

⁸³ The Network presented the main concerns and recommendations at the 83rd pre-sessional working group of the CEDAW Committee, which emphasized the need to continue efforts to strengthen the gender equality machinery in the country (Recommendation No.15), efforts to combat VAW (Recommendation No. 23) and other areas, including employment and education.

However, although some of them were successful, these structures are usually not formalized, for example, through the decisions of national and local assemblies. Hence, their functioning, funding and role in the EVAW process are not institutionalized or well-articulated.

JC5.4. Opportunities for continuation and expansion of the results and activities in the area of the Regional Programme

F5.4. The EVAW Regional Programme and its interventions demonstrated a potential for scalability and replication: its initiatives offer valuable insights and lessons for future programmes and policies. They reveal the potential of effective multi-institutional collaborations, innovative service-delivery methods, and informed legislative advocacy in combating violence against women and girls. Moreover, they highlight the necessity of creating an inclusive and consultative environment to foster ownership among stakeholders, ensuring that initiatives are grounded in the realities of the communities they serve.

The Programme has been a catalyst for change, as according to the key informants, it exemplifies best practices for countering gender-based violence in the region.⁸⁴ However, the Programme's true strength lies in the success of implemented initiatives and its capacity to facilitate the implementation of EVAWG priorities, documenting, sharing and promoting these successful practices. This approach extended the Programme's influence, contributing to efforts in other regions, countries and communities.

The ET finds that the Programme has nurtured an environment of innovation and experimentation and fostered a culture of learning and adaptation, enabling tangible results. In addition, the Programme's practices have been

⁸⁴ KI notes – the stakeholders especially highlighted that these achievements are more apparent considering the relatively small scale of this initiative vis-à-vis the magnitude of challenges concerning EVAW and a broad geographic scope of this initiative.

regularly documented and disseminated via accessible public mediums like publications and newsletters, providing a comprehensive resource for other communities or regions interested in pursuing EAW initiatives. The key informants stated that "this effective circulation of knowledge and EAW strategies and approaches extended the influence of the Programme's successes, engendering a ripple effect of sustainable results far beyond the initial target areas".

One standout initiative that illustrates this is the Femicide Watch, first implemented in Serbia. It aimed to scrutinize and enhance the protective system for women, with a particular focus on cases resulting in fatal outcomes. The initiative conducted exhaustive investigations into femicide instances, revealing critical gaps in the protective system. Femicide Watch was unique primarily because it interviewed perpetrators, providing insight into their mental frameworks, behaviours and decision-making processes. This knowledge paved the way for more informed and effective responses to protect women from violence. The success of Femicide Watch led to its replication in Albania and Montenegro, further validating its approach. National governments expressed their commitment and cooperation. Their active involvement was integral to the implementation and signals promising prospects for future replication of the Femicide Watch model elsewhere. Furthermore, implementing partners have leveraged the survey's findings to advocate for a system to continually monitor femicide, thereby systematically identifying and rectifying shortcomings in protection systems.

A related development is the emerging call for a Regional Femicide Watch. This initiative would monitor individual countries and conduct a comparative analysis of femicide instances across the region. This broader perspective could identify common gaps and successful practices, enabling cross-country learning and system improvement.

In the context of regional activities, the Programme supported rehabilitation programmes for perpetrators of Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (as per Articles 16 and 12 of the Istanbul Convention). In this context, the STOPP project – supporting the implementation of programmes for perpetrators of VAW and domestic violence in Türkiye and the Western Balkans – was initiated⁸⁵

85 The project is run by the European Network for the Work with Perpetrators of Domestic Violence. At the country level, it includes the National Network for the Work with Perpetrators of Domestic Violence (OPNA Serbia), Woman-to-Woman and Counselling Helpline for Men and Boys Albania, and the Centre for Counselling, Social Services and Research (SIT Kosovo).

(with EAW Programme support). This initiative aimed to develop a multi-level capacity-building strategy for general and specialist services for victims and perpetrators of all forms of violence.

The ET found that through this support, Albania, Kosovo and Serbia established four survivor-safety-oriented perpetrator programmes, reaching 58 men in its first year. One partner recognized that these "ground-breaking efforts achieved notable milestones, including training professionals in Kosovo on implementing internationally standardized perpetrator programmes". They also emphasized that in Albania, the Programme supported group work for participating men, with female facilitators co-leading them, thus, overcoming existing beliefs about Albanian men not accepting work in groups or with female facilitators. In Serbia, a partner CSO evaluated their perpetrator-related work for the first time according to international standards. Through the STOPP project, the Programme also supported the dissemination of knowledge and insights on perpetrator programmes in the region. The FE finds that the report "Perpetrator Programs in the Western Balkans: Mapping existing practices and ways forward"⁸⁶ provided an exhaustive overview of these programmes and activities. This research addressed the information gap regarding perpetrator programmes in the Western Balkans, providing a foundation for effective future actions and recommendations at strategic and practical levels. Partners stated that this research, together with other STOPP activities, facilitated "mutual learning among the targeted countries and played a pivotal role in strengthening the capacities of perpetrator programmes in the region". Partners from Serbia stated that the STOPP project generated positive outcomes, such as local authorities in Kragujevac securing funding for a perpetrator programme for the next two years.

Multisector and multi-institutional coordinated response mechanisms among local service-providers are another example of a successful Programme initiative. One example could be from Kosovo, which conducted a comprehensive assessment of existing cooperation between women's CSOs and health-care-providers and identifying potential areas for improvement. This analysis revealed the current protocols health-care-providers employ in supporting victims of violence, identifying specific referral pathways and examining the support available to women affected by violence. Furthermore, the analysis highlighted strengths

86 Available at: https://www.work-with-perpetrators.eu/fileadmin/WWP_Network/redakteure/Projects/STOPP/WWPEN_STOPP_RegionalReport_220531_WEB.pdf

and shortcomings in the cooperation between health-care-providers and women's CSOs and subsequently initiated strategic solutions to address any identified areas needing improvement.

The Programme emphasized grass-roots approaches, implementing activities and promoting awareness of rights and gender equality among men, women and local communities. For example, the Albanian Disability Rights Foundation, the Roma Women Rights Center and the LGBT Alliance addressed violence against disadvantaged women in Albania, targeting Roma women, women with disabilities and LGBTQI+ women. This initiative raised awareness about violence against these women, particularly in rural and marginalized communities.

Innovation was also evident in establishing the CSO-Government Dialogue Mechanism, improving cooperation and collaborative decision-making. For example, The Center for Research and Policy Making (CRPM), in partnership with various ministries, including the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy and the Ministry of Justice, has been working diligently to align domestic laws with international conventions, particularly those related to violence against women and domestic violence. Through these collaborations, the CRPM orchestrated a strong advocacy campaign and a series of activities, contributing to the adoption of the Law on Prevention and Protection from Violence against Women and Domestic Violence and amendments to the Criminal Code, while striving for its conformity with international conventions like the Istanbul Convention.

In the context of strengthened dialogue on EVAW, the ET finds the Programme's efforts to build the media's capacities in participating countries to report on EVAWG as critical, underscoring synergies with other relevant programmes. With this focus on the important role of media in facilitating dialogue and raising awareness, changing perceptions and mobilizing action against violence, the Programme enhanced the reach and impact of its initiatives. In addition, innovative features such as online access and availability of documents in Braille and minority languages lead to enhanced access and inclusivity in service-provision.⁸⁷

The Programme also made significant strides in promoting awareness of rights and gender equality at the grass-roots

level. Initiatives such as campaigns against early marriage and peer-to-peer initiatives for understanding justice services among the most vulnerable women have led to tangible changes at the community level. For example, efforts in North Macedonia to address gender-based violence and early marriage in the Roma community followed a strategic approach through person-of-trust campaigns and door-to-door outreach initiatives targeting men and boys as agents of change. These initiatives, conducted by the National Roma Centrum across multiple municipalities, aimed to spark family dialogue about the damaging effects of these practices, thereby raising awareness about VAWG, gender discrimination and harmful stereotypes. Furthermore, community leaders have been equipped with skills and knowledge to recognize and prevent gender-based violence, while victims have received legal support. This comprehensive approach has resulted in positive court decisions, freeing women from violent environments and granting them access to child support and State benefits. In addition, it has demonstrated the transformative potential of initiatives that integrate education, dialogue and legal assistance.

4.6. Impact

The Programme's focus on capacity-development, awareness-raising, confidence-building, expanding choices and facilitating increased access to services has contributed to challenging and transforming structures and institutions that perpetuate gender discrimination and inequality. This multifaceted approach has supported women's sense of self-worth, expanded their choices and improved access to opportunities and resources, boosted their control over their lives and enabled them to influence social change. These efforts align closely with the core components of women's empowerment.

SQ6.1. The extent to which the EVAW Programme contributed to all dimensions of empowerment

F6.1. The Programme has been focused on women's empowerment, considering it as a process of transformation where women progressively gain control and autonomy over their lives, enabling them to make informed, strategic choices and steer societal change.

The EIGE identifies five essential components of women's empowerment, each of which the EVAW Programme has considered.⁸⁸

87 For example, the Guidebook on Free Legal Aid, prepared by the Albanian Disability Rights Foundation, is available in easy-read format, Romani language and Braille. It aims to help women navigate the judicial process for obtaining legal aid, referring DV cases in court, resources available and other information to guarantee women's access to legal aid support.

88 See more at: https://eige.europa.eu/publications-resources/thesaurus/terms/1246?language_content_entity=en.

Women's sense of self-worth: Cultivating a woman's sense of self-worth is foundational to empowerment. The EVAW Programme has championed this aspect by creating supportive spaces for women, particularly those marginalized or affected by discrimination or violence. For instance, it established safe spaces and counselling centres, like in North Macedonia (particularly interesting have been two newly opened psychosocial counselling centres established by local CSOs Skaj Plus Strumica and EHO Stip), Serbia as well as Bosnia and Herzegovina, allowing women to share experiences and gain strength from each other. These efforts and providing legal aid/advice have reinforced women's sense of self-worth.

Right to determine choices: Empowerment also entails women having the right to make and determine their choices. The Programme has supported partners and efforts to equip women with the necessary tools and resources to comprehend and assert their rights, mainly through legal and policy empowerment initiatives. For example, the Programme has prompted critical legislative transformations, like facilitating the formulation and amendment of laws targeting gender-based violence in BiH, Montenegro, Kosovo, North Macedonia and Serbia and endorsing the National Strategy on Gender Equality in Albania. These initiatives have enhanced women's ability to navigate governance modalities (and the general rule of law), allowing them to make more informed choices.

Access to opportunities and resources: Through the EVAW Programme, women's organizations have gained unprecedented access to resources and opportunities. For example, the Programme has organized training and knowledge-sharing sessions and facilitated engagements with government officials, enabling these organizations to advocate for EVAW at local, national and regional levels. Moreover, the Programme's provision of free legal aid (as in one of the flagship initiatives, with the trained law students) represents a concrete measure to improve women's access to crucial resources. These measures have ensured that women are better equipped to utilize the governing and justice systems in their favour.

The Programme under some activities has addressed economic empowerment. In addition, its robust legal, psychological, social, and political initiatives have contributed to an environment supporting women's rights, choices, and agency, fostering more equitable access to opportunities and resources.

Power to control their own lives: Empowerment also means having the power to control one's own life. The EVAW Programme has been pivotal in reshaping societal norms and attitudes, including promoting changes in

harmful societal norms, improving the coordination and response of service-providers, and implementing robust laws and policies. The Programme's psychological empowerment initiatives, such as supporting a counselling line in Albania and assisting with psychological assessments in Montenegro, further contribute to this goal by addressing the psychological ramifications of violence and fostering mental resilience.

Ability to influence social change: The EVAW Programme has consistently emphasized women's potential to influence social change. Accordingly, it has encouraged and supported women's organizations to become authorities on EVAW, which is particularly evident in the political empowerment efforts. For example, in Kosovo, the Programme's support for women's organizations led to the adoption of the Protocol for Treatment of Sexual Violence Cases, while in Serbia, it supported the establishment of Special Prosecutors' Offices for domestic violence cases. These initiatives underscore women's instrumental role in driving policy decisions and systemic changes towards a more equitable order.

JC6.2.1. The extent to which the Regional Programme is changing the dynamics of power in relationships between different groups (especially for disadvantaged and minority women)

F6.2.1. The Programme has fostered an environment poised for shifts in power dynamics, particularly by creating a platform for a dialogue between marginalized women's networks and support to marginalized groups. These efforts increased recognition of the specific needs (of marginalized groups) and promoted engagement through various activities; however, power dynamics are deeply intertwined with intricate socioeconomic and political frameworks, and the Programme results do not guarantee a straightforward translation into real power and influence.

From a regional perspective, the Programme has facilitated discussion involving marginalized women's networks, the CoE, EIGE and other esteemed institutions. This regionally-established dialogue enabled a platform for marginalized groups' representatives to voice their concerns and share their experiences, highlighting the intersectionality of gender-based discrimination and violence against women.

The ET finds that country-level partnerships between larger CSOs and grass-roots organizations, representatives of marginalized women and girls, and other left-behind groups increased the visibility of these organizations and revealed the needs of the marginalized and disadvantaged groups

that these organizations represent. In Albania, for instance, these partnerships helped improve the implementation of international agreements like the CEDAW and Istanbul Convention, giving grass-roots organizations a say in significant international discussions. Similarly, in Montenegro, the Programme engaged in the production of a shadow report on the implementation of the Istanbul Convention and CEDAW, promoting greater accountability from local and national authorities. In addition, these practices have given a voice to smaller organizations, improving their standing overall, thereby reconfiguring power dynamics to a more balanced structure. Kosovo provides another compelling example of power dynamics shifting through education and capacity-development. The Programme has focused on educating grass-roots CSO representatives and activists concerned with marginalized and vulnerable groups, providing assistance on critical issues such as child, early and forced marriage and gender-based discrimination, thereby empowering them with the knowledge to challenge existing power structures. In North Macedonia, the partnership with small and grass-roots CSOs resulted in established counselling services and models for economic reintegration for the most vulnerable women. This approach has empowered these women to seek employment and regain self-confidence, enhancing their agency and challenging traditional power dynamics.

JC6.2.2. The extent to which there is more engagement between women's organizations and government authorities since the beginning of the Programme

F6.2.2. The ERAW Regional Programme has precipitated changes in laws and policies related to gender-based violence across targeted countries, thus contributing to the broader development discourse in the region. The Evaluation Team meticulously gauged the Programme's accomplishments, examining its influence on systems and policies and the potential ripple effects the Programme outcomes could ignite.

The ET applied the policy cycle model⁸⁹ as an analytical tool to explicate the correlation between the Programme's accomplishments and changes at the systemic level resulting from the more robust engagement between women's organizations and government authorities. Thus, the ET delved into how the Programme has honed policies (strate-

gies and laws) related to gender-based violence, reflecting on the effectiveness and accountability of implementation mechanisms (through partnerships with authorities).

I) Policy decisions (problem identification and agenda-setting) and policy development

The Programme provided materials for defining issues and agenda-setting as closely allied elements of policy decisions.⁹⁰ Thus, the ET finds that by carrying out analysis and assessment and codifying its knowledge and experience, the Programme was able to influence "problem definition and agenda-setting" within the policy cycle. Subsequently, it has recommended apt responses to these issues, thereby contributing to policy development.⁹¹

A particular area of focus for the Programme has been the legal analysis of issues impacting vulnerable women. For example, in Albania, a report was prepared that detailed the gaps in physical and informational accessibility of services for women with disabilities. This crucial work defined the problem and propelled it into the realm of policy discourse. In addition, the Albanian Disability Rights Foundation conducted a legal analysis that scrutinized various domains, including social services, education and employment. This analysis highlighted the challenges confronted by marginalized women, notably Roma women, women with disabilities and women from the LGBTQI+ community. By drawing attention to these issues, the Programme was instrumental in getting them on the policy agenda and suggesting legal revisions. Similarly, in North Macedonia, the Programme supported CRPM in conducting the Criminal Code analysis vis-à-vis international norms/Istanbul Convention and initiating legislative changes. In addition, this framework served for a comprehensive legal gaps analysis in the health sector, focusing on the Law on Health Protection and the Law on Patient Rights Protection.

Beyond the legal sphere, the Programme has had a significant impact on multiple fronts. The publication and subsequent advocacy of the policy paper entitled

89 Guy Peters, B. 2010. "Policy Making Cycle- steps and approaches," In Capacity for Policy: how can we do it better. Tomislav Novovic (Ed.) Belgrade: UNDP.

90 Priority-setting and issue definition are almost inherently complex and involve choosing what issues are essential and inescapable (while many others with greater long-term significance may be straightforward to ignore or define incorrectly). After the identified issues, the next step in setting an agenda is to address them through the actions of the government, its subordinated units or other stakeholders. The "framing" of issues involves defining particular problems under terms that can help to mobilize political support for their adoption. Ibid. (Peters 2010); Jon Pierre and B. Guy Peters. 2000. Governance, Politics and the State. Macmillan

91 Ibid. (Pierre and Peters 2000).

"Promising practices of establishing and providing specialist support services for women experiencing sexual violence" led to firm commitments from four IPA beneficiaries to improve and expand services for survivors of sexual violence. This work exemplifies how the Programme's critical involvement in problem definition and agenda-setting can lead to substantial policy change across countries.

The Programme has prioritized the specific vulnerabilities and needs of marginalized groups. This focus is exemplified by the development of the document "A Life Without Violence Is Your Right," which highlights the experiences of women with disabilities and informs policies for improved support services. Additionally, research on successful integration models for survivors of violence from marginalized communities in Serbia has underlined the need for adaptive, locally tailored policy interventions. Finally, as demonstrated by the assessment of the implementation of Article 16 of the Istanbul Convention, the Programme's commitment to comprehensive policy-shaping solidifies its significant influence on improving perpetrator programmes in the region.

The ET finds that these proposed policy solutions have been instrumental in addressing various and interlinked aspects of violence against women and girls; furthermore, these tested and codified solutions could be easily replicated.

II) Policy drafting, including policy instruments and implementation mechanisms:

The Programme has designed tools and instruments that, according to stakeholders, resulted in new policies and facilitated policy implementation. The iterative consultation with different governing structures and various governance tiers, partner CSOs and other stakeholders⁹² has been critical to shaping national policies, strategies and laws on gender equality and violence against women across several countries in the Western Balkans and Türkiye region. The Programme's wide-ranging impact is reflected in its multi-pronged approach, affecting various policy formulation and implementation aspects.⁹³

For instance, through the provision of technical expertise, the Programme has influenced the development of new national strategies for gender equality, as evidenced in

92 Annual Report for 2020, 2021 and 2022. Also, different reports produced during this period.

93 For examples, in North Macedonia, a meeting was organized with representatives of the Ministry of Justice and CSO stakeholders. Analysis of meeting minutes and workshop reports were made available to the ET.

Albania and Montenegro. The Programme's support in Albania extended to revising local-level coordinated referral mechanisms for VAW cases, demonstrating the Programme's capacity to shape policies at multiple governance levels.

Much of the Programme's work has also revolved around supporting legal reforms. This is seen in adopting the new Law on Protection from Domestic Violence in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, developing a similar law in Kosovo, and amendments to the Criminal Code in North Macedonia to enhance the legal response to VAW. In Serbia, the Programme's influence led to the adoption of three crucial legislative frameworks, including a strategy for combating gender-based violence, a law prohibiting discrimination, and a law on gender equality, highlighting the comprehensive nature of the Programme's policy interventions.

The Programme's efforts in Kosovo stand out for their breadth, influencing policy and law development and establishing communication strategies to challenge gender inequality and stereotypes. Further, it advocated for harsher penalties for individuals found guilty of sexual assault and domestic violence, demonstrating the Programme's commitment to ensuring accountability and justice.

The EVAW Regional Programme has implemented various tools and mechanisms that resulted in policy changes and improved policy implementation.

In addition to these strategies and laws, the ET finds that the Programme has effectively delivered various policy tools and instruments. For example, the Programme developed an analytical framework for national policymakers and women's organizations, providing insights into establishing and delivering specialized support services for women experiencing sexual violence. In addition, State institutions across the Western Balkans and Türkiye adopted guidelines created during the Programme, thus standardizing the response to VAW. These guidelines facilitated support for women and girls who are victims of violence during the pandemic and beyond, outlining actions such as declaring prevention and support services by women's CSOs as essential, providing financial support to women's CSOs, regularly collaborating with women's CSOs in planning responses to the COVID-19 pandemic, implementing emergency protocols for shelters, and prioritizing VAW

and DV cases as emergency cases by courts. In connection to this, during the Regional Forum on Ending Violence against Women, the Programme facilitated the preparation and adopting of a road map to establish femicide watches, enhance service-provision for sexual violence victims, implement perpetrator rehabilitation programmes and challenge discriminatory social norms.

With Programme support, partners also amended and added to multiple protocols. These efforts are critical factors in enhancing the approach to domestic and intimate partner VAW. The modifications included clarifying the roles of various actors, formulating guidelines for risk assessment, preventing and prosecuting femicide, supporting children in femicide cases, conducting police interventions, collecting evidence and documenting risk assessments.

The Programme also provided various guidelines that codified knowledge and experience for EAW-specific areas of intervention, as elaborated in this report.

JC6.3. Existence of progress towards transformative changes on gender equality with regards to prevailing social norms, attitudes and behaviours, and discriminatory practices [if yes, to what extent can this progress be attributed to the Programme?]

F6.3. While tangible impacts may be more discernible after a specific duration following its completion, the Programme has effectively established resilient groundwork for enduring transformations concerning EAW. The Programme has worked to enhance legal and policy frameworks, fortify institutional capacities, broaden accessible services for violence survivors, and effect positive changes in societal norms, attitudes and behaviours towards EAW and gender equality, contributing to "promising signs of catalysing societal shifts". Still, the overarching ambition of a region that challenges violence against women and ensures women's protection and empowerment remains a work in progress.

During its second phase, the Regional Programme built diligently upon the foundational successes and learnings from the first phase and other activities concerning EAW. Still, this phase illuminated the inherent reality that societal transformations – especially those that aim to uproot deeply entrenched attitudes towards gender discrimination and violence against women – require consistent whole-of-society engagement and time. Nevertheless,

partner CSOs highlighted the increase in violence reporting, which could be a critical indicator of Programme efforts, its effectiveness and reach. Furthermore, they highlighted that "this surge derives primarily from the enhancement in rights awareness and empowerment among women (and not necessarily an increase in violent incidents). For example, partners provided evidence that the Programme support resulted in a notable uptick in reporting on violence from rural women (from North Macedonia and Montenegro) and other vulnerable groups (in Albania, women with disabilities and LGBTQI+ women, and Roma women in Serbia and Albania). This trend attests to the Programme's critical role ensured through the partnerships with women CSOs in piercing the veil of silence that has traditionally shrouded incidents of gender-based violence in rural settings and among women who are left behind.

In addition, CSOs, local service-providers and other stakeholders have shared some examples revealing modest yet consistent shifts in societal norms and attitudes towards gender equality. They highlighted "the cumulative power of persistent small steps", emphasizing that the Programme's efforts, working closely with other initiatives, could "gradually lead to a positive transformation in societal attitudes and norms".

Similarly, service-providers (in North Macedonia, BiH and Kosovo) pointed to the effectiveness of the Programme's strategic emphasis on improved joint efforts (coordination and cooperation among the stakeholders), highlighting that "enhanced awareness about the severe consequences of gender-based violence could be a deterrent for potential perpetrators". These comments confirm the Programme's impact on providing survivor-centred services, underscoring its preventative potential.

5. CONCLUSIONS AND LESSONS LEARNED

5.1. Conclusions

RELEVANCE

Conclusion 1: The EAW Programme has been and remained relevant for the region and participating countries

The EAW Programme has demonstrated high relevance in the Western Balkans and Türkiye by effectively meeting the needs and priorities of its beneficiaries and stakeholders. It has aligned with national, regional and international strategies to eliminate violence against women and girls, supporting legislative alignment and comprehensive responses. The Programme's interventions and stakeholder engagement remain crucial to addressing violence against women and girls, emphasizing the need for continued support for capacity-building, institutional reforms and improved access to essential services, especially for the most vulnerable.

The Programme's consistency with international norms and standards, such as CEDAW and the Istanbul Convention, has contributed to meeting international obligations and supporting the EU accession process by aligning its objectives with key EU policy initiatives. However, there is a persistent need to strengthen institutional mechanisms, coordination, and policy and legal frameworks to ensure sustained progress in eliminating violence against women and girls in the region. Additionally, prioritizing access to, and quality of, services for victims of violence, particularly the most vulnerable, is crucial for comprehensive and effective support. (F1.1.1., F1.2.1., F1.2.2, F1.2.3., F2.3., F2.4.)

Conclusion 2: The EAW Programme has prioritized disability inclusion and gender mainstreaming, demonstrating a solid commitment to the rights and empowerment of women and girls with disabilities.

Drawing on the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the Programme has advocated for harmonized legal frameworks, gender-sensitive policies and an inclusive society. UN Women's expertise, leadership and partnerships have played a pivotal role in addressing the multi-dimensional challenges faced by women and girls

with disabilities, amplifying their voices and promoting their full participation. By integrating disability inclusion into its core intervention logic, the Programme has advanced the rights and opportunities of women and girls with disabilities, while also strengthening the broader gender equality agenda and fostering a more inclusive and equitable society for all. (F1.4.)

Conclusion 3. The "leaving no one behind" principle has been considered and followed during the EAW and implementation.

The EAW Programme has embraced the principle of "leaving no one behind" and made significant efforts to ensure inclusivity and vulnerability-focused approaches. By delivering services tailored to the needs of vulnerable groups, the Programme has achieved influential results among beneficiaries.

The comprehensive approach of the Programme aligns with the SDGs, particularly SDG 5 on gender equality, SDG 16 on peace, justice and strong institutions, and SDG 10 on reducing inequalities. Through its interventions, the Programme has advanced gender equality, addressed discrimination, strengthened institutions and reduced inequalities, contributing to the overall sustainable development agenda in the region. (F1.3.)

Conclusion 4. The EAW Regional Programme has demonstrated a strong commitment to promoting gender equality and addressing violence against women and girls in the region.

Gender mainstreaming has been a core focus of the Programme, recognizing that gender equality is fundamental to achieving broader goals of economic stability, transparency, accountability and good governance. (F1.3., F1.4., F1.2.3.)

Conclusion 5: UN Women possesses a clear comparative advantage in executing the EAW Programme, which has reinforced its critical role in advancing gender equality and ending violence against women.

UN Women's proficiency in navigating the complex landscape of national and international organizations, along

with its in-depth understanding of international frameworks and gender equality standards, has been highly valued. The Programme's effective management, strategic approach to civil society engagement and facilitation of regional dialogue have positioned UN Women as a catalyst for collaboration, knowledge-sharing and long-term partnerships. Furthermore, UN Women's leadership, technical expertise and support have been highly important in areas with limited national resources. (F1.5.)

COHERENCE AND RESPONSIVENESS

Conclusion 6: The EAW Programme demonstrated a well-structured and coherent strategic framework, aligning its objectives, activities and expected outcomes.

The Programme's focus on legislative and policy reform, nurturing positive social norms, and empowering women and girls from marginalized groups showcased its comprehensive approach. However, the Programme should enhance horizontal integration and intersectionality to address diverse forms of discrimination and violence more effectively. (F2.1.)

Conclusion 7: The EAW Programme effectively adhered to the corporate strategic priorities of UN Women, particularly to the EAW thematic priority, emphasizing the Programme's commitment to international norms and standards.

In addition, the Programme demonstrated a strong alignment with national and regional policies, strategies and initiatives related to ending violence against women and girls. The Programme acknowledged and navigated the complex sociocultural, historical and institutional contexts of the Western Balkans and Türkiye, tailoring its initiatives accordingly. (F2.2., F2.4.)

Conclusion 8: The EAW Regional Programme showcased complementarity and coordination with other interventions and initiatives addressing violence against women and girls in the region.

Its internal coherence, facilitated by effective communication and collaboration within the Programme Team and UN Women activities, enhanced the implementation and impact of individual projects. Externally, the Programme's synergy with other initiatives created a comprehensive and holistic approach to addressing gender-based violence. Still, strengthening coordination mechanisms, such as TWGs, will further enhance the Programme's effectiveness and cohesive response to violence against women. (F2.4.)

EFFECTIVENESS

Conclusion 9: The EAW Regional Programme has effectively combatted violence against women and girls and promoted gender equality in the Western Balkans and Türkiye.

Its success can be attributed to its robust strategic framework, which ensured a focused and tailored implementation approach aligned with international norms. The Programme has achieved significant milestones in shaping a supportive legislative and policy environment, empowering women, challenging harmful norms, and promoting a culture of respect and equality. It has demonstrated a solid commitment to the rights and well-being of marginalized groups, addressing their specific needs and challenges. (F3.1., F3.1.1., F3.1.2., F3.1.3.)

Conclusion 10: The EAW Regional Programme has shown resilience, adaptability and effectiveness when it comes to ending VAW.

However, ongoing challenges – such as diminishing commitment to gender equality and EAW from authorities, resource constraints, and political instability – pose risks to lasting change. While the Programme has achieved positive outcomes, including expanded accessibility of services and regional solidarity, stigmatization, backlash, the digital divide and limited involvement of State institutions remain obstacles. To sustain progress, a comprehensive and adaptable approach is needed, involving all sectors of society and addressing systemic issues. (F3.3.1., F3.3.2.)

EFFICIENCY

Conclusion 11. The EAW Programme has demonstrated high efficiency in delivering resources, managing budgets, engaging stakeholders and achieving its objectives. Strategic planning, strong management and coordination, and collaborative partnerships have been critical to its successful implementation.

The Programme's management team ensured smooth implementation, adherence to guidelines, and effective communication and knowledge management. Its collaborative approach and strategic partnerships, managed by the Programme Steering Committee and Technical Working Groups, have fostered coordination, synergy and joint advocacy among diverse stakeholders, maximizing programme efforts and impact.

Communication and knowledge management have also been substantial aspects of the Programme. The

Programme has effectively disseminated key messages, engaged stakeholders and fostered open dialogue utilizing various communication channels. Its knowledge-generation and management efforts, including comprehensive reports and online resources, have facilitated stakeholder learning. (F4.1., F4.2.1., F4.2.2., F4.2.3., F4.2.4)

SUSTAINABILITY

Conclusion 12: The sustainability of the EAW Programme's achievements requires additional efforts by participating countries to address challenges related to policy implementation, resource availability and shifting sociopolitical landscapes.

The Programme's impact on policy development and institutional capacity-building provides a foundation for potential sustainability. To ensure the long-term impact and sustainability of the Programme's achievements, it is crucial to address the challenges related to policy implementation, resource availability, and shifting sociopolitical landscapes while supporting partner institutions' capacities and resilience. (F5.1.)

Conclusion 13: The Programme's strong ownership, partnerships and synergies with stakeholders have laid the groundwork for sustainability and long-term impact.

Working closely with civil society organizations and strategic institutions, the Programme fostered engagement, responsibility and influence in setting priorities and implementing activities. Despite challenges related to resource availability and shifting sociopolitical landscapes, the Programme demonstrated resilience and adaptability, ensuring the continuity of essential services for victims of violence. The Programme's comprehensive approach to partnerships, including regional collaborations, has effectively responded to violence against women and girls, resulting in synergies and broader impact. (F5.2.1., F5.2.2.)

Conclusion 14: Ensuring the sustainability of efforts and benefits achieved through the EAW Regional Programme requires addressing challenges related to funding and resources.

CSOs providing essential services face financial constraints and need sustainable funding sources. More substantial political backing, increased public awareness and engagement are crucial for maintaining the continuity and effectiveness of these services. Formalized mechanisms and structures for CSO participation in national and

regional dialogue are needed, along with enhanced regional cooperation mechanisms and broader institutionalization. (F5.3.1., F5.3.2.)

Conclusion 15: The EAW Regional Programme has demonstrated the potential for scalability and replication through effective collaborations, innovative service-delivery methods and informed legislative advocacy.

The Programme's innovation, learning and adaptation environment can serve as a resource for other regions and communities. However, addressing challenges related to funding, resources and the formalization of participation mechanisms is necessary to sustain and continue the Programme's results. Practically, formalized and institutionalized mechanisms at both regional and national levels are crucial for ongoing collaboration and decision-making processes. (F5.4.)

IMPACT

Conclusion 16: The EAW Regional Programme has played a transformative role in promoting gender equality and empowering women. It has enabled access to survivor-focused protection services, facilitated political and economic empowerment, and addressed power dynamics for marginalized women. These interventions have laid the groundwork for building a more inclusive and equitable society.

The Programme has empowered women by providing vital support services, breaking down barriers and addressing stigma. It has facilitated their dynamic participation in decision-making and policy processes, enabling them to shape policies and practices. The Programme has also fostered collaborations between women's organizations and disadvantaged groups, amplifying marginalized women's voices and challenging discriminatory practices. This increased engagement has resulted in developing new policies and guidelines to address violence against women and promote gender equality, elevating the visibility and influence of women's organizations in policymaking processes.

Moving forward, it is crucial to sustain and expand these efforts to advance gender equality further and ensure the continued empowerment of women in participating countries. (F6.1., F6.2.1., F6.2.2., F6.3.)

5.2. Lessons learned

The ET identified the following lessons learned:

Adaptation to evolving contexts: The COVID-19 pandemic underscored the importance of having systems in place to adapt to challenging and evolving contexts. The ERAW Programme demonstrated swift responsiveness by adjusting its interventions to meet the emerging needs of stakeholders and women survivors. It actively listened to CSOs through mechanisms like the Rapid Gender Assessment to understand their pressing needs and revise ongoing interventions accordingly. This adaptive approach ensured that the Programme effectively addressed VAW in the face of unprecedented circumstances. The ERAW Programme demonstrated the importance of flexibility and responsiveness throughout its implementation. The Programme embraced a flexible approach, allowing for modifications to pre-established parameters to meet the evolving needs of stakeholders.

Sustainable support for survivors: The ERAW Programme recognized the importance of providing sustainable support to survivors of VAW, understanding that lasting change and empowerment require ongoing assistance rather than isolated interventions. By offering long-term mentoring and skills-building opportunities, the Programme aimed to empower women survivors and enhance their employment prospects. Additionally, the Programme emphasized the significance of cooperation between CSOs and governments in addressing VAW. Through extensive collaboration, specialized services for survivors were established and sustained, involving joint promotional campaigns, government funding support, and increased participation of women's CSOs in law and policymaking processes. This collaborative approach ensured that policies and reforms were informed by the experiences of survivors and had a greater chance of being effective and responsive. These lessons underscore the need for sustained support for survivors and the power of cooperation between CSOs and governments in creating lasting impact and meaningful change in the lives of women affected by violence.

Scaling up successful pilot initiatives: The Programme piloted interventions within specific contexts, testing different approaches, gathering evidence of their effectiveness and learning valuable lessons before expanding them to additional regions or countries. For example, the pilot reintegration programmes from Albania were later scaled up to four additional municipalities. Similarly, the work on femicide, which started in Serbia and then moved to the regional level, is now being adopted by individual countries like Albania as well as Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Scaling up successful initiatives enables the Programme to achieve a broader impact and influence national policies and practices.

Addressing societal norms: The ERAW Programme recognized the critical role of societal norms and attitudes in perpetuating violence against women, addressing them as a complex but essential aspect of its strategy. Through public awareness campaigns, engagement with educators and community leaders, and the implementation of school programmes, the Programme challenged harmful stereotypes and promoted positive norms and behaviour. It aimed to transform societal norms and promote gender equality as a societal value, going beyond legal changes and service-provision. In this context, the Programme emphasized the importance of engaging with international missions and coordination mechanisms to align its efforts with international standards. Collaborating with entities like GREVIO and participating in coordination meetings with the EU Delegation and national machineries have been critical efforts. By actively involving international partners, the Programme enhanced its effectiveness and ensured its interventions were informed by global expertise and guidelines in addressing societal norms.

The value of advocacy and participation: The ERAW Programme highlighted the importance of advocacy efforts and the active participation of civil society in shaping effective policies and reforms. It enabled CSOs to voice their opinions, concerns and recommendations. CSOs had the opportunity to lobby for legislative changes, provide inputs on draft laws, and critically evaluate the implementation of existing laws. This participatory approach ensured that policies and reforms were grounded in the realities of those most affected by violence against women. The Programme recognized the need to empower and provide platforms and resources for marginalized groups to effectively advocate for their rights and have their insights incorporated into policy decisions.

Regional approach and cultural contexts: The effectiveness of the ERAW Programme was ensured through its regional approach, taking into account the shared cultural, historical and sociopolitical contexts of the Western Balkans and Türkiye. By considering these contexts, the Programme was able to devise strategies and interventions that were uniquely suited to the regions. It facilitated cross-border collaborations, knowledge-sharing and leveraged regional institutions such as the European Union and the Council of Europe. This regional approach enhanced the Programme's impact and effectiveness by harnessing collective efforts and promoting a coordinated response to violence against women.

Tailored interventions: The ERAW Programme recognized the importance of tailoring interventions to specific contexts and needs. It embraced an inclusive approach by collaborating with key partner institutions, including CSOs, to identify the unique needs and challenges related to violence against women in each participating country. By adapting interventions to local contexts and engaging

grass-roots organizations representing marginalized women in their delivery, the Programme ensured that its initiatives were relevant, practical and well-received by the target groups. This tailored approach maximized the Programme's impact and allowed it to reach women who may have been left behind.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

The ET conducted a thorough analysis of findings and conclusions and prepared recommendations that are robust, actionable and responsive to the needs and aspirations of those affected by violence against women based on a thorough analysis of the findings and conclusions. These recommendations are the culmination of the evaluation process, which involved extensive data collection, stakeholder consultations and an in-depth examination of the Programme's achievements.

To ensure the validity and relevance of the recommendations, the ET consulted with stakeholders (duty-bearers and rights-holders). These interactions provided an invaluable opportunity to gather first-hand feedback, insights

and perspectives from those directly influenced by the Programme. Through open and collaborative discussions, the ET sought to understand the various stakeholders' experiences, needs and aspirations, while making sure to incorporate their voices and views into recommendations.

The validation process involved discussing the initial recommendations with the main stakeholders. Their input and feedback were carefully considered and taken into account to refine and finalize the recommendations. This iterative validation process helped ensure that the recommendations were grounded in the realities of the beneficiaries and aligned with their priorities and expectations.

Recommendation 1:

For: **UN Women Regional Office/ UN Women Country Offices**

Priority: **High**

The ET recommends that UN Women continue technical assistance, including capacity-building for relevant institutions and stakeholders involved in addressing violence against women, including law enforcement agencies, judicial systems, health-care-providers and social welfare organizations.

Suggested actions include:

- Support developing and implementing national action plans or strategies for ending violence against women, with clear roles and responsibilities for all stakeholders. Assist in introducing a sound monitoring system and reporting practice to facilitate implementation and share the status of achievements.
- Develop and deliver targeted capacity-building programmes for stakeholders, including government officials, civil society organizations and service-providers, to enhance their knowledge, skills and understanding of gender-based violence and gender equality issues.
- Promote research and data collection on violence against women and its manifestations to inform evidence-based policymaking and programme development. Encourage the use of technology and digital platforms to expand access to knowledge resources, training materials and support networks for stakeholders working on ERAW.

(Conclusion 1, Conclusion 5, Conclusion 8, Conclusion 12, Conclusion 13, Conclusion 14, and Conclusion 15)

Recommendation 2:

For: **UN Women Country Offices**

Priority: **High**

UN Women should advocate for sufficient resources to support institutional mechanisms and services addressing violence against women. The priority is to ensure longer-term commitments and increase funding from governments (and other development partners) for violence against women prevention and response measures.

Suggested actions include:

- Develop sustainability plans that outline strategies for securing long-term funding and resources to sustain the achievements and impact of the EAW Programme beyond its duration. Advocate for increased domestic funding for EAW initiatives, emphasizing the economic and social benefits of investing in gender equality and violence prevention.
- Explore the opportunity to use gender-responsive budgeting as a tool to advocate for the financing of essential services. Improve resource mobilization strategies by diversifying funding sources and exploring innovative financing mechanisms.
- Regularly monitor and evaluate resource allocation and utilization of EAW activities to ensure transparency, accountability and efficiency. At the same time, this approach could serve as an excellent advocacy platform.
- Strengthen partnerships with private sector entities, philanthropic organizations and corporate social responsibility initiatives to diversify funding sources and leverage additional resources.

(Conclusion 14, Conclusion 15)

Recommendation 3:

For: **UN Women Regional Office/ UN Women Country Offices**

Priority: **High**

The ET recommends that UN Women leverage its comparative advantage to support EAW-related activities in IPA countries

Suggested actions include:

- UN Women should continue leveraging its technical expertise, leadership and partnerships to provide guidance, capacity-building and support to implementing partners concerning EAW priorities. UN Women should facilitate knowledge-sharing and exchange of best practices within the country and between different countries
- Work to expand and strengthen collaboration with other UN agencies, international financial institutions and development partners to mobilize resources and support for implementing EAW activities.

(Conclusion 5, Conclusion 7 and Conclusion 8)

Recommendation 4:

For: **UN Women Regional Office/ UN Women Country Offices**

Priority: **Medium**

The ET recommends that UN Women uphold the “leaving no one behind” principle in all activities.

Suggested actions include:

- Integrate the principles and targets of the SDGs into the Programme’s strategies, interventions and monitoring mechanisms. Enhance data-collection and monitoring systems to track progress towards the SDGs and inform evidence-based decision-making.
- Advocate for the integration of gender equality and violence against women issues in national development plans and policies, ensuring a comprehensive approach to sustainable development.
- Strengthen partnerships with national governments, international organizations and civil society to align efforts and resources towards achieving the SDGs related to gender equality and ending violence against women.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct regular assessments and analyses to identify marginalized and vulnerable groups' specific needs and vulnerabilities, including ethnic minorities, rural populations, refugees, and LGBTQI+ individuals. Advocate for the rights and inclusion of marginalized groups in national policies, legislation and development plans. • The ET recommends to UN Women support partners and ensure that disability inclusion is integrated into all aspects of EAW and other interventions, including policy development, service-provision and awareness-raising initiatives. In this context, the ET recommends collaborating with organizations representing women with disabilities to develop targeted interventions that address their specific needs and challenges. There is a need to facilitate partnerships between disability organizations, women's organizations and relevant government entities to strengthen collaboration and ensure the participation of women with disabilities in decision-making processes. <p><i>(Conclusion 3, Conclusion 4, Conclusion 9 and Conclusion 10)</i></p>
<p>Recommendation 5:</p> <p>For: UN Women Country Offices</p> <p>Priority: Medium</p>	<p>The ET recommends that UN Women support authorities in their efforts to enhance coherence and responsiveness to country-specific EAW needs.</p> <p>Suggested actions include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthen support to authorities to integrate and coordinate different interventions and components within the EAW framework, ensuring a comprehensive and holistic approach. • Foster cross-sectoral collaboration and coordination between different stakeholders, including government agencies, CSOs and the private sector, to address the root causes of GBV, while assessing and adapting interventions based on the evolving needs and challenges faced by women and girls. <p><i>(Conclusion 5, Conclusion 6, Conclusion 7 and Conclusion 8)</i></p>
<p>Recommendation 6:</p> <p>For: UN Women Regional Office</p> <p>Priority: High</p>	<p>The ET recommends continuing with the regional approach and strengthening regional networks and partnerships. In parallel, there is a need to continue efforts to strengthen country-level coordination efforts concerning EAW and gender mainstreaming (in all participating countries).</p> <p>Suggested actions include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to foster regional networks and platforms for collaboration among participating countries, national and regional organizations, and stakeholders working on EAWG, such as the Regional Forum on Ending Violence against Women. Continue organizing regular regional forums, conferences and exchanges to facilitate dialogue, knowledge-sharing and joint learning. • Deepen engagement with the European Union, Council of Europe and other critical institutions involved in EAW, recognizing their valuable expertise, resources, and commitment to promoting human rights and gender equality. Collaborative efforts can include joint initiatives, knowledge-sharing and capacity-building programmes. Explore opportunities to establish a more holistic approach and joint efforts that could support authorities (at national and sub-national levels), CSOs and service-providers. By forging strategic partnerships, the Programme can leverage additional expertise, resources and networks, fostering long-term collaborations that contribute to sustainability. <p><i>(Conclusion 1, Conclusion 9 and Conclusions 12–16)</i></p>

Recommendation 7:

For: **UN Women Country Offices**

Priority: **High**

UN Women at the country level should continue its support for "institutionalization" and strengthening of Technical Working Groups or similar mechanisms to enhance coordination and collaboration among stakeholders involved in addressing violence against women.

Suggested actions include:

- Foster partnerships and knowledge-sharing between UN Women and other initiatives, organizations and projects on gender equality and violence against women in the region.

(Conclusion 9 and Conclusions 12–16)

Recommendation 8:

For: **UN Women Regional Office/ UN Women Country Offices**

Priority: **Medium**

The ET recommends that UN Women consider utilizing a coherent EAW framework, with vertical integration of outcomes and interventions, and horizontal integration of activities, and use realistic indicators and targets to ensure a strategic and well-aligned approach to addressing VAW and promoting gender equality.

Suggested actions include:

- Prepare future EAW Programme frameworks with a clear and logical alignment between the objectives, outcomes, outputs and activities. This approach will establish a strong foundation for effectively implementing and monitoring the Programme's interventions.
- Reflect outcomes and interventions areas in the Programme's strategic objectives and activities. It is important to establish a clear causal relationship between the Programme's interventions and the intended outcomes, facilitating a more focused and targeted approach.
- Ensure horizontal integration within the Programme and fostering synergy among components. Implementing initiatives that demonstrate interconnected and complementary activities (rather than isolated interventions) will maximize the Programme's impact and avoid duplication.
- Define realistic indicators and targets, directly reflecting on the Programme's objectives and areas of intervention. This approach will enable explicit contribution claims while facilitating opportunities to attribute changes to the Programme efforts.

(Conclusion 5, Conclusion 6, Conclusion 7 and Conclusion 8)

